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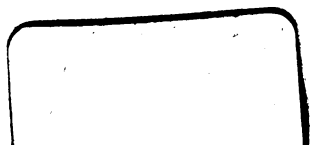


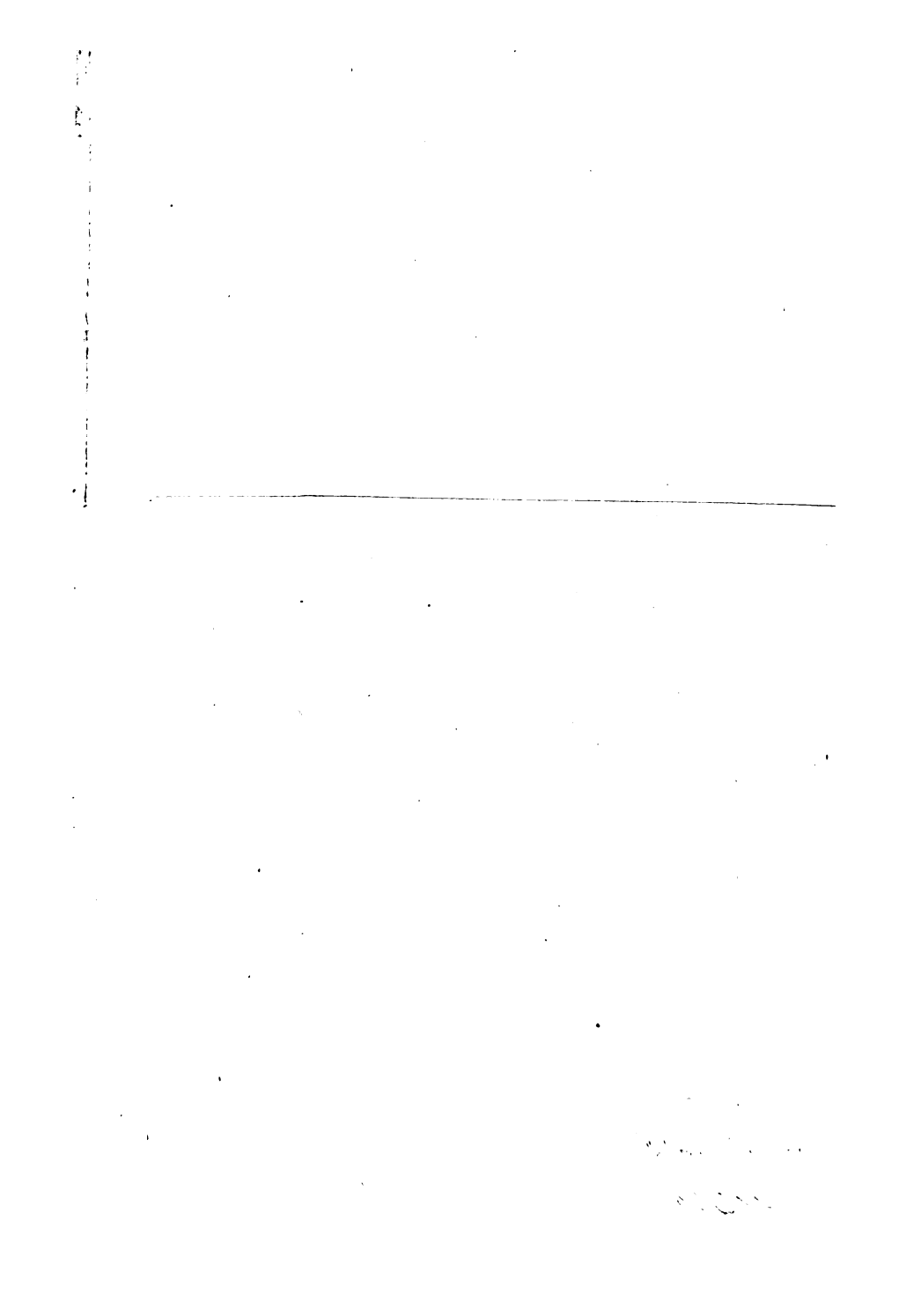
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SIR JAFFRAY'S WIFE



A.W. MARCHMONT





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Sir Jaffray's Wife

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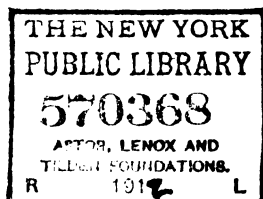
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SIR JAFFRAY'S WIFE.

PROLOGUE.

I.—ON THE DEVIL'S ROCK.

"So you're in earnest, are you, and really mean it this time?"

"Every syllable of every word."

The reply was uttered with the crisp, clear ring of determination, and Lola Turrian as she spoke looked her husband full in the face with set decision in every line of her young, beautiful face.

The husband, a slim, fair, good-looking man, sneered provokingly as he returned her gaze. He shrugged his shoulders, as he answered readily and rapidly, though with a slight foreign accent:

"Upon my word, you are really very beautiful, Lola. I'm not a bit surprised that other men fall in love with you. On my soul, I should—if you weren't my wife already, of course." He ended with a laugh that might have marked any phase of feeling; but there was a threat veiled in the light tone of the question which followed: "and what then?"

"I care not what then," was the answer, spoken with angry emphasis. "I know what you mean, and I care nothing. You mean that you will add informer to your other characters and try to send my father to the galleys. The same chivalry which lets you live on me urges you to whip me with a fear for my father's safety. Would to heaven I had dared you at the first,

and never put this accursed fetter on my life." She was playing nervously with her wedding ring as she spoke.

Her husband eyed her curiously without letting any sign of annoyance at her words appear, and replied with the air of one who is merely balancing the pros and cons of a given course:

"I wonder if I did make a mistake with you, when I stopped you going on the boards. A speech like that to the gods ought to draw many pounds a week to any house. You want a trifle more gesture. If you're going to say it again, either hold up the 'fetter,' and flaunt it in my face, or dash it on the ground. The gallery likes gesture. Don't forget. But you'd better not rehearse here, because the rock is not very wide, and if you chuck much of your jewelry about, some of it's pretty sure to roll down into the gorge, and what goes over there won't come up again. But there, what's the need for me to doubt your powers of acting. Haven't I seen you lead a dozen men on—aye, and to the very verge, only for us to use 'em up in the end? You're a born actress, Lola, with limitations, and in a certain line."

"I'll act no longer, then," returned the girl, for she was little more. "You go your way. I'll go mine."

"And your father can go his, eh? Poor old chap. You're very hard on him, Lola, very hard indeed. To send him to the galleys in that way, and at his age, too."

His cold, sneering indifference goaded her almost beyond the point of endurance; but she fought down her rage.

"I have come out here to tell you that this kind of life must end. I——"

"And a devilish uncomfortable place you've

chosen," he said, interrupting her, and laughing. "Here we are on a lonely crag with these villainous fir trees on one side and a sheer dip right down to the bottom of the ravine on the other, and a sky that looks as though nothing short of a miracle could stop it sending down buckets of rain inside five minutes. I wish you'd be a bit thoughtful. If you want to do an uncomfortable thing you might at least choose a comfortable place to do it in. Look here, let us go to some hotel and have it all out there quietly over a bottle of wine."

"I know what you mean by all this. You think to sneer me out of my present mood. I mean to speak here and now. I came here on purpose."

"What, here on to this infernally bleak Devil's Rock, stuck right in the middle of the Schwarzwald? What rubbish. Lola, do be consistent. Why, when the train started this morning we hadn't an inkling that we should be brought to a standstill at this roadside station, with three hours to wait for the next train, so you couldn't come on purpose, as any fool can see."

"When I knew we had to stop so long, I resolved to bring you here to say what I had to say."

"All right," was the answer, and the husband glanced round as if resigning himself to an uncomfortable experience. "Devilish dramatic surroundings and devilish dangerous, too," he muttered, glancing over the side of the rock into the abyss that yawned below, some two or three hundred feet down. "Might be devilish convenient, too, if you wanted to get rid of an uncomfortable friend. Well, wife, wife, go on," he said, sitting down on a point of the rock, and looking round to shrug his shoulders again and smile. "You've brought me to the dismal depth of a

Swiss wood in order to thrill me with a terrible tale of defiance. Very well; thrill away."

He seemed determined to make light of the interview, and to mock his companion's indignation and emotion. But he watched her all the time, despite his assumed indifference, with lynx-eyed vigilance.

"I repeat, this life shall end," she cried, after a moment's pause, bursting into quick, vehement, emotional utterance. "Shall end, do you hear? I will be your decoy no more—your slave—your tool. I will no longer lure men into the meshes of the net your cruel hands spread for their ruin. You and I shall part; do you hear? part, now and for always. I will be no wife of yours for the future; and if I can avoid it, so help me heaven, I'll never look on your hateful face again."

The man listened in silence, and when she ceased, waited before answering, looking at her with his head a little on one side, and his eyes half closed.

"All right. Good-by;" he said at length, turning away to whistle.

"What, not gone yet?" he added, after a pause, in a tone of surprise. "Pray don't stop on my account. Any show of politeness between us would be such a superfluity of foolish pretense;" and he resumed his whistling.

Presently he stopped, and getting up, went close to her, and spoke in a different tone, seriously and directly.

"Look here, Lola, don't make a fool of yourself. You can't leave me; you know that well enough. My silence is as necessary to you as your beauty is to me. There was never any other bond between us, and never will be probably; but you can't break it. And you must own that I've done well for you. You live on the

best of the land; you've never stayed at any but the best hotels; you spend what you like on dress; you've any amount of lovers. What husband could do more than that?"

The wife made no reply in words, but her eyes lighted with anger.

"So long as you don't go too far with any of them, I never say a word; and the fact that while they are making love to you I am making money out of them ought to give a zest to the business which you should appreciate. Don't be a fool. Of course you want your hysterics in some form or another—all women do; but don't let 'em lead you over the rubicon. This German pig that we're stalking now may be the last we need trouble about. He's rich enough to yield any amount of gold, and if I know love in a fat fool's face when I see it, he's mad on you; and he'll give half his wealth if only you give me the chance to handle——"

"Stop!" cried the woman, hotly. "May I rot if ever I move a finger to help you again. If you want to rob men, go and do it like other thieves. Be at least a man, and don't skulk behind my petticoats. I'll never speak to that German again, I swear."

The man turned a shade pale now, and bit his lip. Then he swore under his fair mustache, and his voice was no longer steady when he spoke. He began to fear that she was in earnest, and this made him angry.

"I will make you do what I wish," he said, and he laid his hand on her wrist.

She shook it off with a toss of contempt.

"Bah, do you think I am afraid of you?" she cried. "Do you think I have ever done what you wished because I feared anything you could do to me? You poor, conceited fool. I'm no more afraid of you than of a rat," and she laughed derisively. At this all

the color left his face with rage. He gripped her wrist firmly and held it while, with a threatening brow, he said in a voice harsh with anger: "Unsay that at once or your father shall rot in jail."

"You coward!" she cried, and stung by the words and the gesture into a paroxysm of rage, she raised the light umbrella she was carrying and struck him with all her force across the face, while wrenching her wrist from his grasp.

He was standing close to the edge of the steep rock with his back to it, and in his surprise and dismay at the blow he stumbled hastily back, and losing his footing, slipped over the edge. As he fell he managed to clutch with one hand at a ledge of the rock, and remained hanging by one hand over the dark, deadly abyss.

For an instant he hung thus, looking up at her, his face salt white and wet with fear and rage, while he made frantic efforts to get a hold with his other hand.

Before he could do this, however, the girl, mad with the rage he had stirred in her, raised her foot and stamped her heel with all her force upon the man's white, strained fingers.

He uttered a loud, sharp cry of pain, and unable to retain his hold, disappeared over the face of the rock.

It happened so suddenly that the young wife stood gazing at the place where he had fallen like one dazed with horror.

But it was only for an instant. Then she drew herself up and raised her head as if with an instinct of defiance. She waited some time and listened. Then she bent forward and called to him.

"Pierre, Pierre," and she was pleased when no answer came. Lying down at full length, she tried to

look down into the gorge; but a slightly projecting breast of the cliff prevented her from seeing to the bottom. Finding that, she moved away, and went to another spot, and tried to get a glimpse of the place into which he had fallen. She thought she could see him lying far down below, but the light was thickening with the growing storm, and she was not certain.

But she made no effort to get help, and when she had waited until the time came for her to leave, in order to catch the train at the station, she walked away quickly. She was glad, and her heart was beating with an infinite pleasure that the man who had gloomed and ruled and deadened her young life was dead.

He had been too hard a taskmaster for her not to be thrilled with a sense of pleasure at the thought of freedom.

II.—FREE AT LAST.

A fortnight after the incident on the Devil's Rock, Lola Turrian and her father sat in close consultation in the old man's bedroom in an hotel in Neuchatel.

The old man was sitting upon his bed, propped by pillows, and his wrinkled, parchment-colored skin looked yellow and dingy against the snow-white bed-clothes. His voice was quavering and thin, but his black beady eyes shone with a light that seemed all the stronger and stranger by the contrast with the weakness of his withered body.

"It's good news, Lola; real good news. I hope the brute is really dead"—the hate with which he spoke of the dead man lent unwonted energy to his voice, while his lean, crooked fingers gripped the bed-clothes with a gesture suggestive of his feeling.

"I wish I'd have been with you, girl, to have made

sure. Imps like those can tumble over cliffs, and yet the devil finds a soft place somewhere for them to fall. If I'd been there," he added, grimly, "I'd have had him found by those who'd have made sure he was dead."

"He is dead, father, never fear. I tell you I went back and stayed at the hotel close to the place for ten days, making cautious inquiries everywhere. If he had escaped, I must have heard of it."

The old man was silent a moment, muttering and mumbling, and shaking his head.

"But you don't know it, Lola. You haven't found his carcass."

"Well, he is dead to me, at any rate. Our paths shall never lie side by side again. He never held me at all, as you know, save for my fear for you. I am not afraid of such a thing as that."

She tossed her head with a gesture of contempt.

"Mark my words, we shall never hear of him again," she added.

"I shall not, child," said the old man. "That's why I sent for you."

The girl rose impulsively at this, and taking her father's hand, kissed it, and then kissed his face, and smoothed some of the white locks which had strayed down from under his skull cap over his forehead.

He suffered rather than enjoyed the caress, and shook his head with a half-petulant movement of impatience.

"You ought to be glad I'm going to die at last, Lola," he continued. "I've been an unconscionable time over it; and that fool of a Dr. Lubin says I can't last now more than a week or a fortnight more; and if I do, I can't get out of bed. What the deuce is the good of living, I should like to know, caged up in a

hole like this, and in bed, and not able to have a scrap of decent food nor a drop of wine; nothing but a cup of nasty stuff that might be pig-swill for all I know. If that's the case, the sooner I go after Pierre the better. I only wish I could let you know that he's there safe bound. We shan't be far apart over there, I expect," he added, with a smile that made his wrinkled features inexpressibly ugly.

Lola said nothing.

"I hope you don't think I'm going to make a fool of myself about dying," he said, querulously, noticing her manner. "You wouldn't have me turn white-livered, and send for a pack of priests, and pretend to wipe out all the record of a full life well lived and well enjoyed, with the cant of half an hour. Psh! But there, that'll do about myself. I'm thinking more about you. What will you do?"

"I have made no plans yet, father. I have only thought so far that you and I would be much happier together now."

"Then it's time you did think, that's all. Your face and form are good enough to win you half a kingdom if you only use them properly; and your pluck—well it's as stanch as mine. You'll go far, if you choose; only mind, don't try to go too fast."

"I don't want to talk of myself."

"I don't care what you want," was the testy reply. "I do; and I mean to. Listen. Drop the name of that infernal scoundrel, and act as though that part of your life had never been lived. Play the beautiful ingenue. Be my daughter, Lola Crawshay, once more, and as soon as I'm dead, do what those cursed relatives of mine would never let me do—go back to England. They'd have stopped my allowance if I'd gone back; but when they see you in the garb of the

mourning orphan—probably dressed for the part, mind—they'll take you in as surely as you will them. I've written a letter for you to the only one among 'em who ever showed she had a heart—old Mrs. Villyers; and if you play your cards as my child ought to, you'll make her home yours, and her introductions be the means of starting your campaign. She's so deadly dull and religious that the world will cash her introductions at sight to any amount just as banks will Rothschild's checks. I've thought all this out, expecting that you'd probably run away from that brute as soon as I was in my coffin, and I've written down here a list of all your eligible relatives, with such hints as occurred to me of the best means of getting round them. I've no money to give you, except a few bank notes; but I can give you a family, child, as good as any in England, and if you don't make your way with them, you're not my child."

"I'd rather you'd not speak," began Lola, when the old man cut her short:

"Do hear me to the end, girl; I've all but done; and you know how it tires me to talk. You'll find everything in that black box, addressed to you, to save trouble. Don't waste your little money on any funeral fal-lals for me. I shouldn't do it on you; and I don't want 'em. Get away as quickly as you can; but post the letter two days before you start—only two days, so as not to give anyone a chance of replying. It's just to say I've told you to go straight to our people in England; and as they don't love me overmuch they may want to put off my child. Don't give 'em the chance, but you go; and when you're there I'll trust you to do the rest. That's the best I can do for you, Lola. You've had a rough time between an old scapegrace like me and a young villain like Pierre; and

you've been a stanch, brave "girl. Now, let me lie down to sleep."

Lola kissed him again; and this time, softened by his own words, he kissed her hand in return.

"You're a good girl when you like, Lola," he said. "I believe you'd do anything on earth for the man you loved—and anything to the man you didn't," he added, dryly.

The girl watched him till he dropped asleep; and then she sat thinking over all he had said. She was really sad at the thought of his death, for he was the only thing she had ever loved in her life.

But he was right when he said he was dying. In less than a fortnight he was in his grave, and she had started for the new life in England; and, despite her regret for the old man's death, she was filled with an intense gladness that the old disgraceful thralldom was over, as well as with eager anticipations of what the future held for her.

SIR JAFFRAY'S WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

MAD FOR THE LOVE OF HER.

"It's no use. I've come back, you see. I guessed you'd be alone now," and Sir Jaffray Walcote laughed, as he passed out through the window of the hotel on to the veranda, and sat down on a low basket chair, which creaked under the weight of his tall, powerful frame.

Lola Crawshay, who was sitting alone at the end of the veranda, looked up from her book, and first greeted him with a glance and a smile, which made his pulses beat faster, and then changed, and said in a tone which implied rebuke:

"You said you would go with the others."

"I know and I meant it right enough. I always do when—when you pack me off. I got nearly as far as the town, and upon my word I meant to go right on and find the little woman and my cousin, and stop with them, just as I said. But—well, I thought of this cozy veranda, and that—that you—" he glanced at her, checked himself and changed the finish of the sentence, adding, "that on such an evening one gets such fine views of the scenery, you know, and all that; and so here I am. That's all," and he turned his smiling, handsome face to her.

"You had no right to come back," said Lola, gravely and almost coldly, and she closed her book, and gathered up the fancy work which she had been doing. Then she rose from her chair and stood just where the sun shone upon her, bathing her in golden light, and making her magnificent beauty seem almost supernatural in its dazzling radiance.

Her companion gazed almost like one bewitched by the glorious picture she made.

"Will you let me pass, Sir Jaffray?" she asked, purposely avoiding his eyes.

He jumped to his feet and reddened.

"Do you mean you are going in? Have I offended you? Don't go."

The last was a whispered appeal, and he looked down at her and seemed to search for her eyes with his. After a long pause she lifted her face, and turned upon him a gaze which thrilled him till he almost trembled with the passion which raged in him.

Then she made as if to speak, but said nothing, and her eyes fell again, as though beaten down by the ardent look he bent on her, and instead of speaking she sighed deeply and tremulously.

She moved on as if to pass him without speaking, but he barred her path, and as though unwittingly, she brushed against him, then stopped, drew back, and started and sank down again into her chair, leaning her arm on the veranda, and her face on her hand, and sitting quite still, like the statue of embarrassed and emotional loveliness.

Sir Jaffray leaned against the rail of the veranda, and made no effort to speak for a while, content to feast his eyes upon her lustrous beauty, and to yield himself up to the full enjoyment of the emotions she had roused.

He was mad for the love of her, and she knew it well enough, and meant to be his wife.

But she knew also that there were difficulties to be surmounted first, and that she must act warily and cautiously, if she was to succeed.

It was more than eighteen months since that scene on the Devil's Rock, and she had already made excellent use of her time in England. She had found Mrs. Villyers, the widow to whom her father had sent her, ready at first to give her only a very cold and formal welcome; willing to do for a relative what the demands of duty, sympathetically interpreted, might require, but unwilling, on account of the ill-odor of Lola's father with his family, to take her into the house on the footing of an intimate and loving friend.

But Lola had amply justified her shrewd old father's judgment; and the winning tact, the clever usefulness, the supple adaptability, and the patient temper which the girl never failed to show, won the old lady's heart, until she was almost loth to let her out of her sight.

As the old man had predicted, moreover, Mrs. Villyers' introduction opened the doors of every desirable house in the county; and Lola's beauty and shrewdness did the rest. She was the beautiful Miss Crawshay, and nobody ever tried to remember that her father had enjoyed and deserved a reputation for such ill conduct as had made his friends pension him off on condition that he never set foot in his native country.

Lola was not long idle, moreover, in making her plans. She meant to marry. She had heard nothing of the man who had forced her to marry him, and she believed him dead. If he was still living it was

almost impossible for him to find her, she thought. Anyway she would take the risk.

The homage which the men all round the neighborhood were eager to pay her wherever she went soon convinced her that she could marry almost whom she pleased, and as she had long convinced herself that she had no love to give and no reason to fear any yielding to a weakness of the kind, she carried a very cool head indeed behind her very glowing and fire-raising beauty.

Her final decision as to the man she would marry came as much by accident as design on her part.

Among her distant connections was a bright, shrewd, gossiping little woman, Mrs. De Witt, whose married life was in Lola's view a curiosity. The husband and wife had no tastes in common, except that they were both intensely fond of the comforts which money can give. They went nowhere together. If they met in public it was generally accidental, and if they stayed at the same place it was owing to quite independent causes. Each had a separate circle of friends, male and female, for unconventional purposes; although both moved in the same social set for conventional purposes.

The "little woman," as most of her friends called her, heard of Lola's beauty and went down to Mosscombe, the village near Walcote, where Mrs. Villyers lived, to see for herself what the girl was like, and to judge whether she could do herself any credit and serve her own purposes by taking her up and bringing her out in London. She was more than satisfied by her scrutiny, and as Lola was careful to show a somewhat different side of her character to her from that known to Mrs. Villyers—though not at all more natural—Mrs. De Witt carried her off there and then

to London, protesting that such a girl must not be shut up in a country box, but must seek her fortune and her husband in London.

At that juncture, however, Lola proved her clever shrewdness. After staying with Mrs. De Witt for a few days, she relinquished what was in fact inexpressibly delightful to her, the pleasures of the London season, in order to return to Mosscombe and Mrs. Villyers. By that one act she secured forever the affections of the widow, who would, after that go anywhere to please her; while she did not leave London until Mrs. De Witt had seen how much use the girl could be in making the house attractive to men.

She paid several visits to the lively little woman's house, and it was in one of these that she met Sir Jaf-ray Walcote for the first time. He had been abroad on a tour half round the world, hunting and shooting, at the time of Lola's arrival in England, and she had thus only heard of him by repute. She knew, moreover, that he was to marry his cousin, a distant relation of her own, Beryl Leycester, whose people lived near Walcote.

Mrs. De Witt had spoken much about him, describing him always as one of her chief intimates, and suggesting, more in her manner than in her words, that there was an understanding between them of the closest and most confidential kind.

The moment that the baronet's eyes fell on Lola, however, he seemed to yield to the influence which she exercised over men, and he never had either strength or inclination to attempt to resist it.

Perceiving this, and knowing intuitively that any encouragement on her part would tend to estrange Mrs. De Witt from her, and being quite unwilling to have so agreeable a house closed against her, Lola held

herself in the strongest reserve against him, and when other things failed, made an excuse and returned to Mosscombe.

The baronet soon followed her, however, and going to Walcote Manor, much to the delight of his mother, who quite misunderstood the reason of his return, began to stalk Lola with as much persevering patience as he had been wont to show with some rare game.

At that time she was on very friendly terms with Beryl Leycester, and her quick woman's wit had shown her how strongly Beryl, who hid her feelings behind a mask of reserve, loved the man whom, by the common desire of both their families, she was to marry. Nor at that time had Lola the least intention or desire to come between them.

How that design was first formed she never quite clearly knew. The baronet's persistency was one great cause, while her determination had been greatly helped by an incident in which his mother, who had never liked her, had slighted her and insulted the memory of her father, and stirred the fires of that temper which she knew so well how to control. But when once the purpose was formed nothing could stay it, and she set herself to weave such a web of witchery over the man as he could not hope to break.

She knew that the climax was fast approaching when, hearing that Mrs. De Witt and Beryl Leycester were going to stay at Torquay, and that Sir Jaffray was to be there at the same time, she persuaded Mrs. Villiers to go there before them, and thus made it appear that the baronet had followed her.

When he found Lola was staying in the place, he did not attempt to conceal his pleasure, and he would have been with her from morning till night if she would have allowed it. But knowing the strength of her

hold over him, she sent him away continually to be with the others, while she herself would avoid him ostentatiously.

This treatment only fed the fever of his passion; however, and absorbed in his love for her and desire to have her for his wife, he was perplexed by the thousand lover's fears and uncertainties which the coquetry of her manner toward him created.

A hundred times in the first few days of this visit he had resolved to ask her to marry him, and he sought to make an occasion; but always they seemed to be interrupted just when he had begun to frame the question; and his wits were too dazzled by his love to see that Lola herself contrived many of the interruptions.

But on the day when he found her alone on the veranda, he had returned determined that he would wait no longer. He was hungering for the knowledge that she loved him. When she was near he could think of nothing else. His mother's objection to the marriage, his more than half engagement to marry Beryl—every hindrance and caution was burnt like dead grass in the fierce hot flame of his passion.

Thus he looked at her with the hot eyes of desperate longing as she sat with her face resting against her hand, and her eyes bent down; and it was like a sweet delirium to believe, as he did, that the emotion which had brought the blood to her cheeks, and made her bosom rise and fall in loveliest confusion was due to the feelings which he had roused in her.

After a long pause he moved slowly nearer to her, and nerved himself to speak.

As he sat down close to her, she turned her head and flashed a rapid glance right into his eyes, and then as quickly turned away; the hot blood surging over her face in a deep blush.

"I want to end this suspense," he said, in a tone little louder than a whisper. "I can't bear it any longer. It's not fair to either of us. I came back on purpose." There was a pause of embarrassment between each sentence.

Lola made no reply, but she was thinking fast what was the best course for her to take.

Sir Jaffray gathered himself for an effort and a resolute look came into his face, knitting his brows and setting his lips for a moment before he spoke again. Then forcing himself to be calm, he went right to the point.

"I love you, Lola, and I want you for my wife."

There was no mistaking the ring of intense sincerity or of concentrated feeling in the calm, strong tone; and the girl felt a flush of triumph as she recognized it. It promised her a certain victory. But she knew that it was not to be won yet, and she played her part with consummate skill.

At first she turned toward him with a look of infinite sweetness on her face, and with the light of love beaming in her eyes; but she checked herself as suddenly, drew back, and then rose.

"That is an insult, Sir Jaffray, and a wrong which you at least might have spared me," she cried.

The words struck him like a slap in the face.

"An insult? A wrong? To ask you to be my wife?" His tone was still calm enough, but it rang with the note of angered pride.

Twice she turned to him impetuously, as if to speak, locking her fingers tightly together as if fighting with her feelings, and unable to utter the words which rose to her lips. Then she clutched the rail of the veranda tightly with both hands, and leaning back, as though at bay, she appeared to compel herself to break the

silence, which once broken was followed by a flood of words poured out with rapid, vehement rushes. She was like one wrung by the deepest passion.

"Why do you say this to me? Why do you torment me? Why tempt me in this cruel, heartless way? Yes, heartless. You know this thing can never be. You know, who better? that between us stands the bar of your unfulfilled promise to your cousin, Beryl Leycester. You know that all the world looks on that as settled. You have known this all through; you must have done; and yet you come to me, and press me to be your wife; you, half-pledged to another woman, can ask me to help you break that pledge by winning from me another! Because you think you can do with me as you will. You hold me for a child, a toy, a plaything, to be used for a season and tossed aside. You know your strength with me. You think because you have made me love you—what do I say? Made me hate you, maybe, for heaven help me, I know not what I think or feel, say or do, where you are. But this I will not do—I will not help you to play that girl false. Go to her. She will make you happier than I ever can. It is not love that makes happiness. That comes far more readily from the easy content of even flowing, placid friendship. You and I are best apart. You think you love me now. You will come to love her in time. You will be happier with her. You and I are two tempest clouds, better apart. With us, life can only be a full heaven or a raging hell. I am afraid of you," and she seemed to cower before him. "Your words scorch me. Go away, or let me go. Let us never meet again. If you have any pity in you, think of what it is to burn as I burn with this love which you have kindled, and to know that I can never—wait! I am mad. Oh, why, why did I ever see

you?" She stopped suddenly, and stood pressing her hands closely to her face.

Sir Jaffray stood by her, immovable, but infinitely moved, conscious of nothing save the wild thumping of his heart against his ribs, and of the mad, bewildering thought that she loved him.

"Let me go in, Sir Jaffray, please," said Lola, her whole manner changed, save for the light in her eyes.

As she passed she touched him again; and he drew back as if afraid of losing all self-control.

"One moment," he said, keeping his voice as steady as he could. "I understand now. You are right. I will do what you wish; and till then I will not say a word more."

He stood back and let her pass without another word, watching her with burning eyes till the last hem of her dress disappeared, and the soft frou-frou of the silk was lost in the room.

Then he turned his face to the light, and a smile of proud triumph lighted it, as he stood and gazed at the sea, and the woods, and the landscape, though seeing nothing, lost in the thought that he had won her, a queen among women.

CHAPTER II.

LADY WALCOTE INTERVENES.

Sir Jaffray was still on the veranda, smoking and day-dreaming after his interview with Lola, when Mrs. De Witt and her cousin Beryl returned to the hotel from the walk on which he ought to have accompanied them, and the former surprised him on the balcony, and before he could escape. Her shrewd instincts scented mischief.

"By yourself, Magog?" she said. She generally had a pet name for her male intimates, as a sort of compromise between the Christian and surnames. This was chosen in reference to the baronet's great size and strength. "I thought some one was with you—Mrs. Villyers, of course,"—this dryly—"and had perhaps stopped your coming with us."

"No, I think she is in her rooms, somewhere," he answered, looking at her.

"She's a sweet old lady, I think, for an innocent; and I certainly do think she's the most innocent growth I ever met—for a woman. She's so fond of dear Lola, too. I wonder where she is. They're the sweetest pair I know."

"I think no end of Mrs. Villyers," said Sir Jaffray.

"Of course, we all do. She's such an obliging soul, too; coming all this way from her comfortable home, and just to please Lola. I hope I shall be as good to my young people when I'm her age."

"One can't think of you as ever being her age," he answered, smiling.

"You don't seem to think of me even as I am, judging by this afternoon," was the retort, prompted by jealousy and helped with a flash of her brown eyes.

But Sir Jaffray wasn't looking at her, and missed this, and his answer was lamentably commonplace.

"That's all you know."

"Why didn't you come this afternoon, then, as you said you would? You know very well that under the circumstances Beryl, at any rate, had a right to expect you."

"Yes, perhaps she had. I'm afraid so. I'm sorry." His companion's words had reminded him of what Lola had said, and he felt uneasy.

"Afraid so! You are not generally more afraid to do what you ought to do than what you ought not." This was said rather sharply. "Why didn't you come?"

"Beryl had you, and you had Beryl," he answered, with provoking slowness.

"And you had?"

"Myself, of course," he returned, getting up.

She got up, too, and stood in his way.

"I don't see why you should want to hide what you've been doing."

"That would be difficult from your sharp eyes, wouldn't it?" and he smiled down at her, good-humoredly.

"Why don't you tell me all about it, then?"

"There's so little in 'it,' you know. Only two letters. I and another."

"I see. You would rather I learned it from the other, then? I can ask her."

"I never said there was anything to ask, please."

"Do you know that Beryl has had letters from the

manor?" asked Mrs. De Witt, changing her line suddenly, irritated at his fencing with her.

"How can I? I haven't seen her since they came."

"Your mother has written to her." This was said as though with special significance.

"The dear mother. She has the best heart in the world," he replied.

"But she doesn't like the second letter of that little 'it,'" and she sought his eyes with a challenge in her own.

"If she has a fault, I am afraid she's too fond of the first letter. I've had my own way all my life," he answered, returning her look, and smiling.

She made a pretty gesture of irritation.

"You're more than provoking to-day, Magog. At one time you didn't keep secrets from me."

"There are some secrets that are not worth keeping from anyone, little woman," he replied. Then he changed his manner and tone completely, and laying a hand on her shoulder, said earnestly and kindly, "Don't worry; wait. I'm only fencing."

"I know that, you great—boy," she answered. "But I want to know more."

"All right, I understand. Well, Beryl," he said, breaking off in a different tone, as his cousin came out and joined them, "I hear you have letters from home."

The girl started slightly at this, and her usually calm and rather cold features flushed somewhat, as if the words had some embarrassing reference known to herself.

"Yes, I have had one from the mother." The two always spoke of Lady Walcote as "the mother," Beryl being motherless.

"Is anything up at the manor?" he asked, noticing her concern.

"No. Everything is just as it was when we left a week ago. The mother has not been very well; worried, she says. She asks me to give you this letter." The tint on her cheeks deepened somewhat as she held out to him a letter, and met his eyes looking at her with direct and rather searching inquiry.

While he opened the envelope, Beryl turned to Mrs. De Witt.

"Do you know the news? Mrs. Villyers is going home. To-night, I think, or first thing to-morrow."

"No, I hadn't heard it," answered Mrs. De Witt, looking with a keen, quick glance at the baronet, and surprised to see him start and flush, and then, with an effort, recover his self-possession.

"The dear mother," he exclaimed, folding up the letter with a care and precision which to the keen eyes watching him were overdone. "She is the very best soul in the world. What is that about Mrs. Villyers? Going home? That is a coincidence. I am going home to-night. We must travel together, if that can be arranged."

"Good," exclaimed Mrs. De Witt. "Very good, and very natural. Magog, you have inherited all your mother's goodness of heart, and have developed with it all your own powers of acting. This little surprise visit of yours will give her such delight. She loves to have you with her, talking over all your plans with the frankness innocent of childhood; and it will be so pleasant to travel with—dear Mrs. Villyers."

A dry little smile passed over Sir Jaffray's face.

"You are a keen thought reader," he said.

"What plot are you two hatching now?" said Beryl, looking from one to the other. "I hoped you were

going to stay," she began to Sir Jaffray; but then checked herself.

"I had intended to stop, Beryl," he said, looking at her steadily; "but I am compelled to go home to see the mother, after this letter," holding it up. "If you wish it, of course, I'll come back. You know I always like to do what you wish, if possible. The mother knows that, too."

Beryl so rarely showed her feelings that the deep scarlet blush which now rushed over her face, coloring it a vivid red from the roots of her rich brown hair downward as she rose and made an excuse and went indoors hastily, surprised both her companions, and especially Mrs. De Witt, who did not see anything in the baronet's words to cause it, and did not understand the reference in them.

"Where are we all this afternoon, Magog?" she asked, in perplexity.

"Where we were not last week, and shall not be to-morrow," he answered, sententiously, and with a smile.

"Are you turning sphinx?" she asked, a little irritably.

"No, I'm only the soothsayer, waiting to see what I ought to say, and acting on instructions;" and with that he went into the house.

"If I don't read that very clever Miss Lola's hand in this may I never flirt again," exclaimed Mrs. De Witt to herself, as soon as she was left alone. "But I'll find out from her what passed this afternoon, if I have to ask the question point-blank."

Meanwhile Sir Jaffray had gone to read over again and answer the letter from his mother, and he ensconced himself in a corner of the smoking-room.

"I wish she hadn't left so soon," he said—he wasn't

thinking of his mother then, however—"it makes it look as if I was following her, but, by Jove, it can't be that. It can't be that she's in earnest and means to part altogether." The bare thought of this filled him with a feverish fear. "Wish I'd knocked this business about Beryl on the head before I spoke. Poor little girl!"—this was Beryl—"I wish I'd never—but what's the good of wishing? I never had the ghost of an idea that I'd got such passion in me till I met Lola. Beryl's a good sort, but it's no use to think of that now. I couldn't marry her, feeling as I do. I wish—oh, what an infernal nuisance it is when your people set to work matchmaking. And one's so helpless. Worse than if there was a regular understanding. I could go to her, then, and out with the truth, but I can't as it is without posturing as conceited ass enough to assume that she's in love with me. I hope it hasn't gone so far as that. I wish I'd never—gad, I hope she won't feel as I should feel if things went wrong now with Lola. Wonder why the mother is so down on her. She oughtn't to have written such a letter as this. She wouldn't if she'd known. She'll be all right when she does know. Let me read it again quietly and without that sharp little devil's eyes boring holes in my skull. She's a little demon."

And with this complimentary shaft at Mrs. De Witt he took his mother's letter out of the envelope and read it again:

"My dearest Jaffray:—

"You are a good son, and will not, I know, have forgotten the subject of our last conversation. I write to refer to it because I hear, very much to my sorrow, not that I am surprised though, that Miss Crawshay has so timed her visit to Torquay as to be there with you all. You may, and probably will, see

nothing in this but a coincidence, unless you unfortunately find it a pleasure; but I can look at it with very different eyes. You think you know women in general, and Miss Crawshay in particular. Men are always making that silly mistake. But it takes a woman to know a woman, and I have not lived sixty years in the world for nothing, and I have not so blunted my instincts as not to be able to read my own sex. I have warned you to beware of Lola Crawshay. She is not at all what she appears. She comes of a rank bad stock, and she promises to do credit to her training. Her father, as you know, was one of the worst and most unscrupulous of men, and as for her mother, she was some woman from Southern Europe whom the man picked up in some of his disreputable wanderings. The girl herself has completely befooled her stupid old aunt by flattering her ridiculous vanities and playing on her silly fads, just as she has fooled nearly everyone who has come near her. She is, of course, a beautiful creature—so is a rattlesnake; and both are about equally harmless. She can fool every man on whom she pleases to use her eyes, because she is beautiful; and no man could ever yet understand a beautiful woman without marrying her. If you want to know the value of beauty, ask men who have lovely wives; or girls who have lovely mothers. I urge you, then, Jaffray, not to take this beautiful, dangerous creature on trust. I do not know how far you have gone with her; I am sad at heart when I think you are in love with her; but I sicken with fear at the thought of your ever making her your wife.

“Remember also that you are really bound in honor to another woman. Your father wished that you should marry your cousin Beryl; her father desires it above all things; and you know that it is the dearest wish of my heart. More than this, you have acted up to now as if you meant to marry Beryl, and in that way you have won her heart. Beryl loves you with her whole heart, Jaffray, and you have led her to do so. I know this well enough; and she is the truest and purest of good women. I have often talked with her about the time when she would be your wife; and

I have now written to her a letter telling her much of what I have said here; and that I look on you as already pledged to marry her, and I have asked her to give you this letter, knowing its contents and my wishes.

'I am acting in your real interests, my son; and in that cause I do not hesitate to take a very unusual step.

"Your loving mother,

"Gwendolin Walcote."

Sir Jaffray had broken out several times with short, sharp exclamations while reading the letter; but when he had finished he sat four or five minutes in close thought. Then he wrote his reply:

"My dearest mother:—

"It will be bitter to me to disappoint you, and more than bitter if you cannot receive with love the only woman in the world I can possibly marry—Lola Crawshay. Were she as black as you paint her, I would choose no other woman for my wife. It is too late to alter my choice. I am coming home to-morrow to see you about it. Your loving son,

"Jaffray."

"It is better she should know right off," he muttered, as he folded the letter and addressed and stamped the envelope. "She knows I don't alter easily, and it will pave the way for our talk."

He strolled out of the hotel to smoke and think.

It was the crisis of his life, but he faced it like all things, resolutely and boldly, looking the difficulties full in the face, making his decision firmly, and holding to it with the tenacity of his race.

Two things he regretted deeply: His mother's groundless prejudice against Lola, and the complication about Beryl. But neither of them turned him by so much as a hair's breadth from his purpose and resolve.

He had drifted into the present relations with his cousin. It had been the wish of others that he should marry her, and he had acquiesced in the plan because no one else had ever touched his heart. He had liked her in the calm, unruffled way in which her nature had appealed to him; and had always admired her.

But he felt now as though there had never been a thought of love toward her in all his heart.

Now his feelings were a mixture of fear and hope; fear lest his mother was right, and lest Beryl might feel something of that desolation and misery which the thought of losing Lola suggested to him; and hope that his mother was wrong. Beryl was so true and genuine a soul, had been such a staunch friend and dear companion in the past, and had taken such a strong interest in all that concerned him, that he was profoundly grieved at the thought of bringing sorrow to her.

He wished, indeed, that he could have laid the whole thing before her, as he had often done with other and lesser puzzles and just have talked it out quietly like friends.

He missed the help which the girl had often been to him; and he was thinking of this as he sauntered onto the veranda at the end of his stroll, and saw her sitting there alone, just in the corner and in the chair where Lola had sat in the afternoon.

He went to her and sat down in one of the creaky basket chairs near her.

"Well, walking about to think, Jaffray?" she said pleasantly, "after the old habits?"

"Yes. I was thinking about my going off to-morrow. I'm going to see the mother, you know."

"I thought so from what you said to-day," replied

Beryl, quite calmly. "What train do you go by? Shall you come back?"

This commonplace way of meeting what he had meant as an advance rather disconcerted him, and he answered tamely:

"I haven't fixed the time yet," adding after a short, uncomfortable pause, "I'll come back if you wish, you know."

But at that he blamed himself lest she should misunderstand him.

The girl laughed softly, but quite without sign of restraint. She was an excellent actress, too.

"You don't seem to know your own mind very clearly. Not like you."

"Some people seem to think I know it too clearly," he answered, thinking of his mother's letter.

"Oh, people often make blunders trying to guess one's wishes, I think."

He thought he could detect a little nervous ring in her voice, suggesting an undercurrent meaning, but before he could say anything she added:

"Of course you'll just do as you like about coming back."

"Do you mean you want to release me from my promise to stop a fortnight here?"

"I don't remember any direct promise, Jaffray," she answered, with the same slight unsteadiness of tone.

"But even if there had been a direct promise—I shouldn't want to hold you to it. Never." This word she spoke with emphasis, but added directly in a lighter tone, "Nor would Mrs. De Witt, I am sure."

"Do I understand you, Beryl——"

"Who's that taking my name in vain? Beryl, I thought you knew me better than to believe it possible for any soul on earth to say what I would or would not

do five minutes before I did it. I hope I'm not so commonplace as that yet." Mrs. De Witt laughed, not quite pleasantly, as she joined the two.

The interruption irritated Sir Jaffray greatly. It had come just at a point when the interview seemed working right round to an understanding.

"I was only telling Jaffray that I was sure you would not hold him to any pledge to come and finish the time of his promised stay here."

"Indeed, but I would, and I will, and do. And if he doesn't come it will be the worse for him and everybody," she said, with significant emphasis. "In the first place I want some explanation of his going away at all."

"Urgent private affairs is the usual plea in the service."

"Covering anything from a racket in town to a secret love affair," said Mrs. De Witt, with a challenge in her eyes and manner. "And I'm sure that can't be your case, Magog."

"You're a very shrewd guesser," returned Sir Jaffray, with a look which the challenger understood.

"Do you mean I'm right? But there's no one here except Beryl, and there's no secret about her," she replied, stepping boldly on the thinnest part of the ice. "Except, of course, Lola Crawshay."

Her two hearers winced at her boldness, and in the midst of the momentary pause which followed, a smooth voice was heard:

"Dinner is served, if you please."

"For which relief much thanks, eh, Magog?" laughed Mrs. De Witt. "But it's only a respite, understand, and I'm too hungry to go any further now."

With this they all went into the hotel, the baronet hurrying away to change.

CHAPTER III.

LOLA'S VICTORY.

"Isn't Mrs. Villyers coming, Lola?" asked Mrs. De Witt, as the three ladies sat alone, waiting for Sir Jaffray, Lola having joined them at the table.

"No, dear, she has a headache," answered Lola.

"Wants to avoid being questioned about her change of plan and sudden departure, I suppose," was the reply.

"Very likely," said Lola, calmly. "I never knew anyone who shrank from a certain kind of curiosity more than she does."

"Yes, she's a sweet-tempered woman. She's so—what's that word you use sometimes, Beryl?—so altruistic—that means helping others out of a ditch and keeping your lips close, doesn't it?"

"Not quite," returned Beryl.

"Well, it's very convenient now, at any rate," said Mrs. De Witt. "I'm really sorry she can't come; for I'm positively curious about the reasons for your scampering off in this way, Lola; and just at the time Magog's off as well. One of you might be following the other. I hope Mrs. Villyers has not been setting that very stiff and proper cap of her's at him and is running away from defeat."

"I hope not, indeed," returned Lola, with earnest innocence, quite equal to Mrs. De Witt's. "She is the best of good creatures, and a love disappointment of the kind is the last thing she deserves. She has said nothing to me about it; but there, of course,

she couldn't, could she?" And Lola turned her large lustrous eyes upon Mrs. De Witt with an expression of real concern in them.

"No, I don't think either of you'd exchange confidences on such a subject," said Mrs. De Witt, dryly, but smiling very sweetly.

Beryl was amused despite the undercurrent of interest there was in the dialogue for her, and she smiled.

"I don't think it's very probable," she said.

"Well, if anyone ought to know, you or I should, Beryl. You've had all the confidences of his first boyhood, and I most of those of his manhood."

"The shortest plan is to ask him himself," replied Lola. "Here he is. Sir Jaffray," she said to the baronet, as soon as he had taken his seat at the table, "we are puzzled—the dear little woman can't understand why you are leaving Torquay suddenly. I did not know you were leaving till she told me, you know, and she wants badly to know why you are going. Will you tell us?"

There was not a gesture or expression in her face or manner to suggest that she could know anything about it. Her attitude toward him was precisely what it had always been, and her perfect self-command and composure pleased him. He took his cue from her readily. He smiled as he answered—

"Is she asking again? Just now on the balcony out there she wanted to suggest that it was something about you, Miss Crawshay."

Lola laughed, a soft, low, sweet laugh, that made the men who were at the tables within earshot look up and turn round, and feel suddenly interested in the doings of the group which contained three such pretty women, and the distinguished-looking man.

Mrs. De Witt and Beryl were both perplexed by the conduct of the other two, and the former glanced quickly up to the faces of them both as if to find there an explanation; but she found nothing.

"In here she hinted, as I think very unkindly, that there was some love-making at the bottom of it, and that you were running away, either with, or from, Mrs. Villyers—I didn't make out which. I suppose that's not so?"

Mrs. De Witt looked up quickly, expecting to intercept a glance of understanding between Lola and Sir Jaffray; but she was disappointed.

"No; indeed not!" returned Sir Jaffray.

"Lola, I think you're one of the most daring girls I ever knew," said Mrs. De Witt, suddenly. "You've a Balaclava pluck. You dash right in under the hottest fire and try to spike the guns which are shelling you right and left."

"Not left, dear," returned Lola, who was sitting at one side of the small table alone, with Mrs. De Witt on her right hand at the bottom, and Mrs. Villyers' empty place between her and Sir Jaffray, who was at the head. She pointed to the vacant place with a sweep of the hand which included also the baronet, and laughed.

Mrs. De Witt understood her, and a fresh course coming in at that moment, Beryl took advantage of the interruption to change the conversation and lead it away to matters which were not charged with personal references.

When they rose from the table, Mrs. De Witt purposely linked her arm in Lola's and walking with her into the drawing-room, returned to the attack.

"What passed between you and Sir Jaffray this afternoon, Lola, on the veranda?" she asked.

"My dear, there was nothing passed between us. There was nothing to pass; we were alone."

"Your repartee is conveniently active to-night, dear. You know what I mean. What did he say? What happened? What was the result of the interview?"

"The dead ashes of a burnt-out fire and—a good deal of cigar smoke," she answered with mock seriousness and laughing eyes.

Mrs. De Witt bit her lip.

"You mean you won't tell me, Lola?" she said, irritably.

"My dear, I'll tell you everything you ask me. You know I've no secrets from you, even about our own smoke. What do you want to know?"

"Did Sir Jaffray propose to you this afternoon?" asked her companion, pointedly.

In a moment the girl changed. She drew her arm out of her friend's, and with a manner which suggested that she considered the question had overstepped the bounds of even the friendly footing on which they were, she answered:

"Surely, you forget. Sir Jaffray, as you have yourself told me often, is all but engaged to marry his cousin. Do you know him so little as to think he could fool with me under those circumstances? Or me so little as to think I would let him? You've been wool-gathering, my dear, to-night. Now I understand what you meant at dinner. On my word I hope Sir Jaffray didn't, or I should never look him in the face again. But I must go to Mrs. Villyers now. Good-night; I shan't come down again; and good-by, if I don't see you again." And before Mrs. De Witt could answer Lola had kissed her and slipped out of the room, leaving her as puzzled as ever, but yet

certain that there was "something in it," and angry because she could not find it out.

In the early afternoon of the following day Sir Jaffray arrived at Walcote. His mother had been looking forward with a little apprehension to the interview with him, knowing as she did his great tenacity of purpose. She held so strong a conviction that a marriage with Lola would mean ultimate disaster, however, that she was resolved to struggle against it to the end.

But she could make no impression on Sir Jaffray's resolute determination.

"I will marry no one else," was the burden of his case, and nothing she could say or plead would alter him.

"Mother, I have come, not to hold out any prospect to you that your wishes can prevail in this," he said, toward the close of the interview. "I am sorry that you hold the opinion you do, and I have listened carefully to all you have said. But you have not changed me one jot or tittle. A man must choose his wife for himself. So it has been since the world was young, and so it always will be. What I have come to you to do is to tell you that the complication in regard to my cousin Beryl, which you and others have caused, however unwittingly, and until now with my unfortunate help, you and others are in duty bound to remove. Only yesterday with your letters to Beryl and me you increased that complication, though, mind you, I don't believe Beryl does care for me as you think, or would wish."

"You are pledged to her, Jaffray," said Lady Walcote.

"No, I am not pledged. I have acquiesced in a mistaken course while I did not know my own feelings.

That is all. I have never breathed a syllable to her which could suggest that I loved her, or that I wished her to be my wife. You must see her and explain matters."

"Why?"

"Because Miss Crawshay will not hear a word from me while other people couple my name with Beryl's. She is acting as an honorable girl, of course, in this."

"Yes, acting," returned Lady Walcote, dryly. "She would be no Crawshay if she could not do that. She knows her power over you. She has infatuated you, Jaffray."

"Mother, I have never in my life consciously allowed an unkind thought to find a lodging in my mind," said Sir Jaffray, very earnestly. "Don't say what will leave a sting behind it. I can't hear things against the woman I am going to marry. Try to reconcile yourself to this. Try to see that you are prejudiced, that you have no cause to dislike Lola except that she has come between you and a plan which you have cherished. That is now impossible. It would be the foulest treachery and cowardice for me to marry Beryl, feeling what I do toward Lola, and you know how bitterly she herself would resent it. Can't you do this for me? You have done so much. Help me now to the happiness of a lifetime."

He stood looking down at her, and then stooped and kissed her.

She sat silent for a minute, and then asked:

"Where is Miss Crawshay?"

"With Mrs. Villyers, at Mosscombe."

"I will go and see her first, and then tell you my decision," and with that the interview closed.

Lady Walcote lost no time in carrying out her pro-

posals, and ordering her carriage she drove over at once to Mosscombe.

When Lola heard that Sir Jaffray's mother was waiting to see her, she felt that there must be a trial of wits between them, but conscious of her hold over the baronet she was confident of the issue.

"My visit will be a surprise to you, Miss Crawshay," said Lady Walcote, as soon as Lola entered the room. "I have seen Jaffray to-day."

"It is an honor, at any rate, Lady Walcote," was the reply, calmly spoken.

"When we parted last time," said the old lady, "we were not fortunate in choosing topics which allowed of our agreeing very well. I trust we shall be better friends now."

"I hope so, earnestly," replied the girl. "And with that object we had better not touch upon the same subjects, had we? I am very jealous of my father's good name. He was to me both father and mother."

The old lady looked piercingly at Lola as she spoke, trying to detect any signs of artifice.

"I knew your father long ago," she replied, "and I cannot but know what his family thought of him. I do not want to say things to pain you, but this is not a moment for keeping silence for the sake of avoiding delicate subjects. My son desires you to be his wife, and as his mother I wish to know many things."

She paused as if to wait an expression of Lola's willingness to tell her what she wished to know. But the girl made no sign.

"Do you object to my asking you some questions?"

"I think you should ask them of Mrs. Villyers," answered Lola, cleverly. "I have talked very freely with her. If you think she is capable of introducing

from her house anyone about whom you have these qualms, is this not an interview at which she should be present?"

"No, I am not doubting her belief."

"Then you doubt my statements to her? Is that it? I think, Lady Walcote, we shall be wiser to keep off topics of the kind. Stay one moment. Let us put the matter plainly. Your son has asked me to marry him, and I have refused. I have told him that I will not be his wife, that I will not allow him even to put such a question to me, and that I hold it for an insult, so long as he remains bound, directly or impliedly, to his cousin and my friend, Beryl Leycester."

"He told me that, but that is not all."

"All," echoed Lola, as if moved by the word into some warmth. "You mean that is not all, so far as he is concerned. And what of me? Have you thought of me once in all this? What my feelings will be? Or do you think, as he seems to think, that I am merely something to remain unconsidered, unesteemed, uncared for? Something for you to come and examine and test, and approve or disapprove? Some cold and feelingless thing, to be placed under the microscope of your family pride? You may forget, though I do not, that my father's family is as old and as honorable as your own, and that we do not recognize your right to precedence in any one respect, save only a title and a fortune."

Despite her prejudice, Lady Walcote could not help admiring the girl for her pride and courage.

"I know your family tree better than you, probably, and I have never questioned the past history of it," she said.

"You mean you question only myself as the present member of it, and my father because he was driven

abroad. But was there never a dark page in the history of your own family? Has every one of your son's ancestors been as good and true a man as himself? I do not want to pain you with unpleasant stories of the past; enough that I ask whether your son is worse on account of the character and ill deeds and wild extravagance of his grandfather?" She had gathered this from the little secret history which her father had written for her guidance; and it was easy to see how the shot told on Lady Walcote.

"You have your father's daring, Lola," she said, using the Christian name for the first time.

"There is much of my poor dear father in me, I know," said Lola, allowing her manner to soften, as she came to what she meant to be the turning point of the interview. "And, frankly, I would not have it otherwise. You and those in England know one side of his character; I another. I know he was wild, that he gambled, drank, cared nothing for religion, and committed a crime which drove him to exile. In all that he was what the world calls bad. But a truer heart a stancher friend, a kinder father he could not have been. In all his troubles, in all his riotous living, in all his wildness, he had never a harsh thought, or unkind word for me. You are right in thinking I am not as your girls here in England. I have lived at times the wild Bohemian life to which he was driven, and I never had a mother to stand between me and the rougher side of it. But from the hour when I left the convent school at Amiens—from choice, for often he wanted me to leave him and come to England, but he was the only thing that had loved me, and I had loved, and I could not leave him in his old age—from the first to the last, he watched and

guarded and cared for me with a love that all my life long must make his name a sweet sound in my ears."

Her voice trembled as she spoke the last words, and she paused, and then resumed speaking with sudden impetuosity.

"Do you blame me? Do you say the daughter was wrong to prefer to stay by the father's side, at the risk of her future in England? Well, if you do, I cannot help it. I would do it again; only too cheerfully, if I could bring him from his lonely Swiss grave. I am not of the cold, callous natures that love and hate where expediency points and judgment suggests. I love because I love, rashly, wildly, madly may be—but at least I do not forget who and what I am, or what the honor of my family demands."

"Do you love my son?" asked Lady Walcote, suddenly.

At the question Lola was like one moved by an overpowering rush of tempestuous emotion, which swept over her, carrying before it all the checks and bars of restraint which she had imposed upon herself. Her eyes filled with light; she flushed, and then paled instantly; her fingers were interclasped with strenuous force, and her lips were rigidly pressed, while her nostrils dilated with the fitful gusts in which her breath passed and repassed from her heaving bosom; then she appeared to fight down her feelings, and gradually to recover self-possession. When she spoke, it was calmly and harshly.

It was a magnificent piece of acting, and it lulled even the sharp suspicions of Lady Walcote.

"I will not listen to that question, if you please, Lady Walcote. Young as I am, my experience has told me that love alone cannot give happiness in mar-

riage. I will not marry your son without your consent; and on that I pledge you my word."

"My dear, I believe I have wronged you," said the old lady, rising as she spoke and kissing the girl's forehead.

And without saying more she went home.

When Lola was alone in her own room, and the door was locked that no one might even see her face, she let some of her natural feelings show there.

"It was a bold stroke," she muttered, smiling. "But what then?" She vented a little oath in French. "What is a pledge more or less? If it wins her round, so much the better; if it doesn't, it is easy to break it. But I'll make her pay the price—when I'm Lady Walcote and she's the dowager."

Then she laughed.

"I ought to be on the stage after all. Pierre was wrong to stop me. I wonder——" she stopped and her face darkened. "I wonder if he is alive after all. Well, it's the fortune of war," and she tossed up her hand with a defiant gesture. "He's not likely to find me. He'll certainly never look for me as Lady Walcote; and if he finds me—bah, what then? I am not afraid, and as for the two men—they must settle it for themselves. But, dead or alive, he shall not alter my plans by a hair's breadth. Heigho, if these good people did but know!"

And she laughed again.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EXPLANATION.

It would be difficult to analyze precisely Lady Walcote's feelings as, leaning back in her carriage and thinking closely, she was driven back to Walcote.

While she had been with Lola she had yielded to the impulse of faith which the girl had stirred; but as soon as she was alone, and her old doubts recurred, she began to look searchingly at all that Lola had said.

It was in its effects then that Lola's cleverness in giving the pledge not to marry without Lady Walcote's consent was proved. It was difficult to accept the promise as anything but a proof of the girl's complete good faith; and as this it prevailed with Lady Walcote.

/ She had gone to the interview convinced of Lola's deceit, and with a strong belief that if only she could strip off the veil, a past more or less compromising would be seen. But the interview had changed much of this opinion; and again in this, the girl's shrewdness had been great.

She had not attempted to make herself too white. She had painted her past as having its evil associations and connections with which she would necessarily be brought in contact. Her plea was that she had not been injured in the contact. Had she pleaded that there was no sort of guile in her past, Lady Walcote would have rejected the plea without a word. But the implication that there was much temptation

to do wrong, and the plea that she had been kept from it by the thought of the honor of her family, had gone straight home to one in whom the pride of race was like a religion.

Another effect of the interview was to convince Lady Walcote that if Jaffray loved Lola, his love was returned to the full as passionately; and this had appealed naturally to the mother's heart, softening her judgment of Lola.

She regretted the affair as much as ever; she did not believe that Jaffray would find half so much happiness with Lola as with Beryl, and she would have cut off her right hand to have him marry Beryl instead of Lola; but the sting of her opposition was gone, because the reasons for it were changed.

Sir Jaffray saw this almost as soon as he met his mother at the carriage door, and gave her his arm into the house.

"Well, mother?" he asked, as eagerly almost as a boy.

"What I say will not stop you, Jaffray, I know. You are set on this marriage, and I can see in it disaster as plainly as I can see Lola's beauty." He noticed the use of the Christian name, and was pleased. "If you do what I wish, you will not marry her."

"And if I cannot think as you do?" he asked.

"I shall not stand in the way any longer."

"I am glad——" he began; but she interrupted him at once.

"Don't misunderstand me. I am as much opposed to it as ever; but since seeing Lola, I have changed some of my thoughts. I dread the marriage and fear the consequences, but you shall not find me otherwise than ready to try and welcome your wife, even if my heart is full of foreboding."

"I am glad," said Sir Jaffray, quietly, and he kissed her.

It was not a very auspicious consent, but Sir Jaffray was satisfied. He knew how strongly his mother had desired the marriage with Beryl, and how hard she always fought against giving way in any such cherished project. He was pleased also at the thought that Lola had thus won her round from what seemed an uncompromising and invincible resistance.

"And Beryl, mother?" he added, after a pause.

"I will see her myself," said Lady Walcote. "And now that you have conquered in all"—she smiled sadly—"let me go."

He opened the door of the room where they had stood, and as she passed out, he said:

"I know all this means to you, mother. I shall never forget it all my life."

She answered with a smile and a glance laden with love, but yet sad.

When he was alone he became thoughtful and restless, and after wandering through the house and round the stables, he had his horse out and set out for a hard gallop across country—an old habit.

He met his mother again at dinner and was sorry to notice a kind of reserve between them. Neither mentioned the name of either of the girls who formed the subject of the thoughts of both until the end of dinner, when, as Lady Walcote was leaving the table, she said:

"I have written to Beryl, Jaffray, thinking you would like the thing settled at once, and not feeling equal to a journey to Torquay."

"I am glad. You are as thoughtful as usual," he said. Then, as if seeking her opinion, he added: "I was thinking of going back to Torquay?"

The old lady stopped and paused.

"It might be a trial to you both; but if you could have some sort of explanation it would smooth the future, and Beryl is very dear to me."

On that he resolved to go, and that Beryl might have warning of his coming and so avoid an interview if she pleased, he wrote a little note to Mrs. De Witt, saying that he proposed to return to Torquay on the following day, and that if they were not staying or had other plans, she had better wire him in the morning. There was no telegram by noon the next day, however, and he started with questionable anticipations of his talk with Beryl.

One effect of his letter to Mrs. De Witt he had not counted on. She thought that the letter to her came as a result of their friendship, and she met him alone at the station.

"I'm glad you've come back, Magog," she said. "I thought you would. I had to use my wits, though, to get rid of Beryl. Those innocents are always such stickers; but I've done it. Your letter was quite a stroke of genius." She laughed and flashed at him a look which she meant as a signal of her pleasure.

"Do you mean that Beryl has gone away?" asked Sir Jaffray.

"How stupid you are all of a sudden! What do you suppose I meant? What else did you mean me to do but to send her away when you wrote about 'changing plans?' You didn't want her here, I suppose, did you?"

"I see," he answered, with a good-natured smile, "you wanted a cozy time." He let none of his vexation appear.

"I've had none of you during the whole time we've been here," she replied, with an aggrieved air.

He made no such answer as she had wished, and this annoyed her, and they walked a little way in silence. When they reached the promenade they sat down, and Sir Jaffray, who was in doubt whether Beryl's having left might not after all mean that she had wished to avoid an interview with him, and that while Mrs. De Witt thought she had got rid of Beryl, the latter had in reality been glad to go, tried to find this out.

"When did Beryl go?" he asked.

"Oh, Beryl, Beryl, Beryl, it's nothing but Beryl with you!" was the testy rejoinder. "Early this afternoon, as soon as I could get rid of her."

"Did she know I was coming?"

"Oh, the conceit of you men. Of course she did, and said that after the disgusting way you flirted with Lola she would have nothing more to do with you."

She laughed again at this.

"You laugh savagely, as if you wished that was true. I see she didn't know. All right!"

"When I want a good time I'm not quite dolt enough to ask all the world to come and take a hand. I hate three-handed whist. You can ask her to play—when she's your wife."

"Then she'll never play at all."

"Then it is true after all, is it, and Lola gets the odd trick?" cried Mrs. De Witt, looking up quickly. "I thought so, two nights ago. Tell me all about it. But how about Beryl?"

Sir Jaffray smiled at her eagerness.

"You've called me an 'odd trick,' and I'm not sure that that's a compliment," he said.

"Bah! You men are all card tricks to us. Some we win, some we don't, some we throw away, and

some we can't hope to get; a good many we win by bluffing and finessing, and some are snapped up because we are fools enough to revoke. But it's a compliment to be called the odd trick—that's what we're all fighting to get."

"Are you fighting to get me?"

"Haven't I maneuvered now to get you alone here; and aren't you in about the most objectionable and uncomfortable mood possible? You're not a bit worth fighting about, and you're not fit for anything but to be married."

"You're a bit put out," he answered, adding after a pause, "I'm glad I came over, because we ought to have a word or two to put matters straight. Of course it must make a change in things."

"You mean your engagement with Lola?"

"Yes."

"Under the circumstances I wonder you came," she replied, crossly.

"I came to see Beryl."

"I think you're very horrid," she rapped out, irritably. "That means that I'm not only in the way, but that I've acted the part of marplot in stopping or postponing a most interesting explanation between you two. I think I'd better go to my hotel;" and she got up from her seat and rustled her dress, angrily.

"I'm sorry you take it badly," said Sir Jaffray. "But you must see that something of the kind had to be done. Things couldn't go on."

"I don't know what you mean by 'things,'" she said, crossly. "Marriage needn't make a man a boor—before it happens. There's plenty of time afterward for all that. Of course, I can quite understand your wanting to train for an Arcadian existence, and you can't begin too soon. But you needn't start by blud-

geoning every woman you've known while you haven't lived in Arcady."

"Sorry you've taken it like this. We've been good friends, little woman, and I've many a thing to thank you for."

After a long silence Mrs. De Witt said, suddenly:

"I must have seemed to take it very seriously, I'm afraid. But remember, I'm only a woman; and when we lose the odd tricks, it's not only that we're vexed at losing them, but angry with those who have won them from us."

"That's all right, but then you and I could never play anything else but double dummy all our lives. And that's not a riotously lively game."

"But it's sometimes safer than when the cards are not on the table," she retorted, adding, after a forced laugh and in a changed voice; "I think I'm glad, Magog, after all. I do really. She's a magnificent creature, and as clever as she's beautiful. That's praise from a woman. And if you'd only told me what you wanted and meant, I could have helped you. And really, under the circumstances, I'm sorry that I sent Beryl off to-day before you came—though if she knew of this she may have jumped at the chance I gave her of getting away rather than stop and see you. You don't expect her to like it, of course."

Sir Jaffray thought there was more naturalness in her manner than he had ever noticed before. This pleased him, and when they reached the hotel they shook hands and parted better friends than ever, perhaps, so far as he was concerned.

He was glad to have had the opportunity of the conversation, and as he leaned back in the railway carriage on his return journey, the incident suggested

to him the changes in his life which his marriage with Lola would make.

He had drifted into the friendship with Mrs. De Witt, and on his side the relations had never got as far as even the mildest flirtation. He had been glad to go to her house when in town, and had been amused more than anything else to watch her develop a habit of monopolizing him. He had been quite keen enough to read her, and quick enough to avoid anything like a compromising complication.

Never before had she made such an effort at direct flirtation as in the case of this arrangement to get him to herself for a time at Torquay, and he smiled as he thought how she had thus been paid out in her own coin and left alone, as the result of her maneuvering. He had meant to drop the more pronounced friendship as soon as his engagement was certain; and he knew that there must be some kind of explanation. "Things couldn't go on," as he had said, and he was glad that the matter was over so easily.

As to Beryl, he was by no means so satisfied. It was true that so far as the idea of a marriage was concerned he had been forced into it largely by the actions of others; but at the same time the thought of causing Beryl sorrow and trouble was one which distressed him grievously. They had been stanch, true friends from childhood, and in many ways she had been like a sister to him.

She was, moreover, such a clever, sympathetic, and ready-witted girl that at one time the prospect of a life companionship with her had been full of pleasure to him. Many of the incidents of their comradeship recurred to him, and he was sensible of a feeling of regret that in the future the relations would have to be different. He hoped that Lola and Beryl would

be friends, and he tried to persuade himself that by his mother's influence this might be the case. But the hope was, at best, a faint one.

When his thoughts slipped the meshes of these light entanglements, however, and went to Lola, there was nothing in them but the passionate confidence of the absorbed and devoted lover; and he wove a thousand fancies with the brightest colored skeins which the glowing desires of passion could select.

He did not reach home until the early hours of the morning, having to drive a long distance across country from Brantxton, the main line station at which the express stopped, and, of course, saw no one. When he went down late on the following morning Lady Walcote came to him, and saying that she had had a letter from Beryl, who had returned home suddenly, handed him one from her addressed to him. It was not long, but it had cost the girl much to write it.

"My dear Jaffray:

"The mother's news about you has not surprised me in the least. I have been using my eyes and ears, and my chief feeling was a little regret that somehow you had suddenly thought it not worth while to consult me. You ought to have known how, as a woman, I should be longing to take a part, and as a friend, should be most anxious to help you in finding happiness. I wish it you with all my heart.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"Beryl Leicester."

"She is a good sort," said Sir Jaffray, handing the letter to his mother, who read it quickly.

"Yes. It would be difficult to find a more sensible girl than Beryl."

"I'll see her to-day," answered the baronet.

CHAPTER V.

"MY NAME IS TURRIAN—PIERRE TURRIAN."

Beryl had not written the letter of congratulation to her cousin without a considerable struggle.

She did not like and did not trust Lola; and she had noticed in her many things that had sharpened this distrust.

She had at one time seen a great deal of Lola, as Mrs. Villyers had made many efforts to bring the two girls together; and though at first Beryl had to some extent come within the influence of Lola's unquestionably attractive manner, there had been no regard or real affection between them.

Quite irrespective of her own disappointment—and how deep and stinging and bitter that was, no one but herself knew—Beryl was dead against the marriage. She felt that Lola did not love Jaffray, even with such love as she was capable of feeling. She had bewitched him with her lustrous beauty and glamourised him with her surface sensuous charms—but that was all.

Had Beryl written as she felt, therefore, her letter would have been very different. But she had a far too genuine friendship for her cousin to want to cause him anything but pleasure.

She would have done her utmost to prevent the match, but she would not say a word to wound Sir Jaffray's feelings.

Nor was this feeling altogether free from a touch of self. So far as she could help it, not a soul should

think that she was in reality anything but pleased at the marriage. She was no fool to mope and pule over a lost romance; and she held no ridiculous ideas exaggerating the effects of the disappointment to her. It would have been an infinite and indescribable pleasure to pass through life by the side of Sir Jaffray as his wife; but she did not intend that the breaking of the dream should gloom and spoil her life.

She would rather that it had been anyone else than Lola; but even so, she was prepared to accept what was inevitable. Thus when Sir Jaffray came, she surprised him as much with her cheerfulness as she had surprised her father by the way she had told the news to him.

"I'm afraid it'll be a disappointment to you, father," she said, when telling him of Sir Jaffray's engagement; "but I was always afraid we shouldn't be able to do what you wished. I tried, because I saw that you and his mother wished it; and I'd have gone through with it, but I must confess it's a relief."

Her father who, as a county man, took great interest in the public affairs of the district, and had only a dim perception of what went on in his own house, put on his pince-nez and looked at her shrewdly. He was very fond of Beryl in his way, and his chief complaint was that she was not a boy; but he thought he knew her so well that of course he did not understand her at all, and had no conception of the capable brain there was behind the calm, regular, and at times beautiful face.

"Do you really mean that Jaffray's going away from his word? Why, it was all but settled." The thing that appealed to him chiefly was that it looked like a breach of contract. "And do you mean you didn't

want to marry him? You never said that before, child."

"I didn't want to seem to thwart your plans, father," Beryl answered, returning his look calmly.

"Have you two made this up between you?" he burst out, as if with a sudden instinct of shrewd conjecture. "I call it infamous." His own misconception, that there was a plot not to do that which he wished, irritated him. "I'll give him a piece of my mind," he added.

"No, we have made up nothing, father. Simply, the thing has fallen through, because it was impracticable. This sort of thing may be done where there's a lack of feeling on one side, but it's impossible when there's none on either side."

"It's infamous," he repeated, now quite angry. "I'll post the man all over the county. I'll hound him out of the place. I never heard of such a thing. We might be shopkeepers, making and breaking engagements of the sort."

"But I'm glad, father, don't, you understand? I wouldn't have it otherwise if I could. It was a mistake from the first."

"Do you think I don't know what's best in these things?" he asked. "Upon my word, times are getting on when a girl can coolly tell her father that his plans for her marriage are 'a mistake from the first.' And with two estates that run side by side for miles, and no boy to have this one. Mistake, indeed, misfiddlestick!" He rustled with a gesture of impatient anger the paper he held, and appeared to resume reading it. But a minute afterward he said, less irritably—

"Why didn't you tell me you didn't want to marry him? That's just like you women; and yet they will

stick their noses into public business. You never know what you want at a time which lets the knowledge be of the least possible use. I didn't want to force you in the marriage, child. I'm not a brute or a bluebeard."

The last connection was not very clear, but it let Beryl turn the question.

"Bluebeard married all the women himself, dad," she said, laughing; and placing her hands on his shoulders, she leaned over him from behind, her face so close to his that she could rub her cheek against his, and kiss him at every pause. "And you don't want me for a wife yourself, you know, do you? That would be horribly improper, and all the county would make a hullabaloo, and you'd lose your chairmanship of this, that, and the other, and be sent to Coventry. And I'm not worth that, am I?"

She was so rarely demonstrative in this way that he was quite perplexed, and when she had kissed him and made him agree with her view of Sir Jaffray's engagement, and had gone smiling out of the room, he sat a couple of minutes in puzzled thought till the light broke in on him, and he smiled.

"I'm afraid I've been a bit blind. I thought she cared for him a bit, and now here she is so infernally glad to be out of it that she can't help kissing and hugging me. Bless the child, if I'd known, I'd have broken it off long ago, much as I wanted it. Heigho, if only the boy had lived there'd have been no worry of this kind," and then he resumed his reading, interrupted by pauses of thought.

But he never doubted for a moment that he had now read Beryl's feelings accurately; and she was careful to keep up her spirits, and keep down her feelings,

until her father was quite reconciled to the fact of the arrangement having come to an untimely end.

With Sir Jaffray, Beryl took a somewhat similar course.

"Of course I guessed it long ago, Jaffray," she said. "Do you think you and I have been like brother and sister without my being able to read a good many of your thoughts? Of course not," and she laughed without the least apparent restraint.

He noticed that she was unusually demonstrative. "I thought it would surprise you," he said.

"If it surprised me, it was because it didn't come sooner. I've always known that there must come a time when this would happen on your side or mine"—she laughed again as she said this—"and I always wondered how it would feel if I were to be first, you know, and had to tell you, just as if you were really my brother. I often wondered how I should do it; or how you'd do it if you were first. I never thought you'd think of keeping such a thing secret. And I've watched you, you know, and seen it growing, and wondered why you never uttered a word. I should have told you what I guessed the other night at Torquay—the night the mother wrote us those most ridiculously mistaken letters—only, if you remember, Mrs. De Witt came out and stopped us in the middle. And after all, you can't make an opportunity for that sort of confidence. It has to come naturally."

He listened to her closely, comparing the unusual manner with her customary calm reserve, and he got much nearer to the real state of her feelings than had her father. It hurt him; but he showed no sign of this in his manner, seeming to fall in with her humor.

"She's a good little soul, the little woman," he answered, "but she does put her foot in it sometimes."

I wish now I had told you about this, Beryl. I hope you'll get on with Lola."

A little chill seemed to touch the girl's heart at the sound of the name, but she answered quickly and with warmth:

"I hope so. We've not seen so much of one another lately as we used to, but she'll be nearer when she's at the manor. How is Lady Walcote?"

"She is coming over to see you to-day sometime, I think. She saw Lola the day before yesterday, you know—she went to Mosscombe, to Mrs. Villyers."

"I am glad she has given way, Jaffray," said Beryl, pleasantly. "Of course, I know what she thought. It would have been a great pain to her and to you if she had not been able to do what you wish. I am very glad."

"I find everyone's awfully good," returned Sir Jaffray, and then Beryl led away the talk to other subjects, striving hard to make her cousin believe that so far as she herself was concerned, she was not anything but perfectly pleased at the news.

But she said not one word in praise of Lola, nor one which could lead him to believe that she liked the woman he had chosen for his wife, or thought he had chosen wisely and well.

Strangely enough, he was really anxious to get some such expression from her, and he stayed longer than he would otherwise have done, in the endeavor. But he failed, and the failure disappointed and irritated him.

He tried to be vexed with her in his thoughts; but he only succeeded in feeling dissatisfied; and he could not shake off the impression that in some way it was an ill omen not to have Beryl's good word.

Throughout the time that followed, Beryl did her

utmost to mislead others as to her real opinions. Lady Walcote came to see her, and she went to the manor just as usual; and even the close and loving intimacy which existed between the two women never led Beryl to say a word other than that she had always tried to carry out the arrangement for the sake of the family interests, but that it was a relief to her to have an end put to it. Lady Walcote at first questioned this, and made her doubts plain enough. But Beryl held to her position, and in the end prevailed.

What did more than anything else, however, to make the girl's real feelings difficult to understand was her attitude toward Lola herself. She acted precisely as she might have done had there never been any idea that she herself should marry Sir Jaffray; and she bore herself toward Lola as though the latter, by her engagement to the baronet, had become a member of the inner circle of the family, who was therefore to be treated as an intimate.

She was neither so cordial at first that people could think she was seeking to hide any mortification under that cover; nor so distant as to suggest hostility toward the girl who had supplanted her. She allowed the relations between them to develop naturally, and she drilled herself to take a keen interest in all the preparations for the marriage.

In this way she completely baffled Lola herself, quick and shrewd though the latter was. She could not understand that any woman who had really loved a man could see him taken away from her, and yet harbor no anger against the woman who had taken him.

"If she'd done it to me, I'd have poisoned her," she exclaimed to herself more than once, after she had been watching Beryl closely, and had been more

puzzled than usual. "She can't have cared for him, or she's the most artful devil that ever wore petticoats."

In time she came to the conclusion that Beryl's calmness was not, as she had thought at first, a mask; but the natural expression of a woman who had no deep feelings to stir, or in whom they had never been stirred.

Thus, during the preparations for the wedding, the two girls were much together, and when people knew that Beryl was to be the chief bridesmaid, and that she and Lady Walcote were as keenly interested in all the details of the wedding as Lola herself, they read Beryl's conduct from the surface and agreed that she, and not Sir Jaffray, was responsible for breaking the family arrangement which had been generally understood to exist.

Sir Jaffray himself was delighted at the turn which things took, and as everyone seemed to be anxious to make matters smooth and agreeable for him, he had good cause to be. For the two months which had been agreed upon as the term of the engagement, he lived in a lover's paradise, with nothing to rouse him to the truth.

It would have been idle to tell him that Lola did not love him, and that he was being fooled. Beryl could give herself no reason beyond her own instinctive reading of Lola's character, while even Lady Walcote did not agree with Beryl.

Whether or not a longer engagement would have led to his disillusion it is difficult to say; but the end of the two months' engagement and the approach of the wedding day found him more infatuated than ever with Lola; and Beryl was so glad at his quite boyish delight that she prayed earnestly her own unpleasant

anticipations and forebodings might never be realized.

The wedding was brilliant. It took place on a glorious day in the late autumn; and the whole district of Mosscombe and round Walcote kept holiday, Lola having urged that everything should be done to give to the event the utmost possible importance for the largest number of people. Sir Jaffray had given this wish of hers the most liberal interpretation, and for many years the county had not seen a marriage marked by more ceremony and pomp, and accompanied by such widespread merry making and lavishly generous hospitality.

Both Lady Walcote and Beryl were glad when it was all over; and the girl was pleased to think that she could now slip back into her quieter life, with the knowledge that she had played her part properly and made quite plain her attitude toward the marriage.

She did not contemplate that there could be any real intimacy between her and Lola; but she felt that as they were to live as near neighbors all through their lives there must always be some amount of friendly relationship maintained.

It was a great relief to her, however, that Sir Jaffray and Lola planned a very long honeymoon. Lola would not go to the Continent, but preferred America, and would not be satisfied until Sir Jaffray had agreed to take her over the ground of one of his rough hunting and shooting expeditions. She was no conventional bride, she declared, and didn't want a conventional honeymoon; and he yielded to this, as to everything she asked.

They planned a tour then which would take some months, and it was resolved that they should be away

during the whole of the winter, and not return until the new year was at least four or five months old.

Beryl was heartily glad of the arrangement. It would spare her from what was a great secret pain—the continual presence of Sir Jaffray; and she reckoned that by the time of their return she would have drilled herself so thoroughly into the altered state of things, that the pain and smart of the wound would be past.

She set herself a liberal round of daily work of a varied kind, and held to it with the resolve that it should provide her sufficient occupations to keep her aloof from much intercourse with Walcote Manor. But she laid her plans in necessary ignorance of a course of events which were destined to mix her up more closely than ever with Sir Jaffray and Lola.

In the early part of the new year Beryl was booked for a visit to an old friend's house, and after busying herself with some of the preparations she was walking one afternoon in the park close by the drive and not far from the house, when she noticed a stranger going toward the house. Her father had frequently people whom she did not know to call upon him on various matters of business; but strangers were still rare enough to attract attention; this one was certainly out of the common.

He was fair, handsome, and foreign looking, and the girl had time to notice him closely, as they were both walking toward the house, and he was some twenty or thirty yards ahead of her.

As she entered the house by a side door, the servant met her and said that there was a visitor waiting to see her in the library.

"To see me, Challen?" she asked the man.

"Yes, miss. He said it was to see you on particular business—private business, miss."

Beryl smiled.

"Are you sure there is no mistake? What is his name?"

"Turner, miss, pronounced foreign. I couldn't quite catch it; and he didn't give me a card."

"Well, I don't understand it; but I'll go and see him."

She went without waiting to take off her hat, thinking there was some mistake, or that the visitor was on some begging expedition.

"You wish to see me?" she asked, when the man rose and bowed with the air of a man of the world at his ease.

"Miss Beryl Leycester have I the pleasure of seeing?"

"Yes," she answered, rather stiffly, not liking her closer scrutiny of him.

"Then I have come to beg the honor of a few words on a matter which is of great consequence to me. My name is Turrian, Pierre Turrian. I don't know whether your fellow got it correctly."

"I do not know the name."

"That is true; I am afraid, quite true; nevertheless, you can render me a great service; and it may be that what I have to say will interest you greatly. It may take some time to say all I want to say, however; may I pray that you be seated? I have a leg that is a bad servant since I—met with an accident some two years ago."

He placed a chair for her with an air of exaggerated politeness, and she sat down, out of consideration for him, and disliking him more and more every minute.

CHAPTER VI.

PIERRE TURRIAN'S STORY.

Beryl's visitor did not speak for some moments, but sat as though collecting his thoughts and seeking the best way to commence.

The girl eyed him very closely and curiously. He was well dressed, his clothes being cut in continental fashion, and he had altogether the appearance of a man of the world, alert, resourceful, shrewd, and, as she thought, calculating and vindictive.

It was evident to her that the business which had brought him to Leycester Court was, as he had said, important, and that he was cautiously deliberating how to introduce it and how not to make a mistake.

"My visit is a surprise to you, no doubt, Miss Leycester," he said at length, a smile of courtesy parting his lips and showing his white, long teeth.

"Necessarily," replied Beryl.

"You don't know my name, Turrian? You are sure you never heard it as that of man or woman? Turrian? Of Montreux?" and he pronounced it with deliberate emphasis, and looked hard into Beryl's face.

"Not to my knowledge," she replied.

"No, no; probably not. Probably not. *Ma foi*, how should you? It is a name common enough, and anyone could easily hear it and then forget it again. Is it not so?"

"I have never heard it," repeated Beryl, irritated because he dwelt on the point. "But what is the business you have come on?"

"Precisely. That is the point. Just so. What is the business? Well, I have not come to talk about myself and about my name. That has nothing whatever to do with it, nothing whatever." Then he added with another of the smiles which the girl found so unpleasant: "That I mentioned it so pointedly at all is only my vanity. It would have been with deep, deep pleasure if I had found that the reputation, not of myself, but of my violin—I am a musician—had reached to Leycester Court. But I could not expect it, and I am rightly served. To be frank, it is a question I put everywhere, everywhere I go, because my fame is my life."

Beryl saw that for some reason he was misleading her, and doing it clumsily and laboriously.

"Will you tell me, please, what it is you want?" she said, sharply.

"You English are so practical, so pointed, so blunt. Yes, I will tell you. I am meditating a work that I believe will have a prodigious effect on the musical world. It is a treatise on my instrument, the violin. I am advocating nothing less than the addition of a fifth string to my beloved instrument. That is a daring thing to do, Miss Leycester, is it not?"

"What do you want with me?" she asked, impatiently.

"I am troubling you, I see; I am sorry," he said, lifting his white, thin hands and shrugging his shoulders, while out of his blue eyes she caught a sharp, swift glance that almost startled her with its keenness, and told her he was acting and wanted to read the effect upon her. She tried to look as stupid and impassive as possible.

"I really don't care whether the violin has four or

five, or fifty strings," she answered, as if crossly, but really interested now.

"That seems to me inconceivable; absolutely impossible. If I had a fifth string," he began to speak with rapid energy, as though the subject carried him away, "I could produce effects by the side of which the mightiest effort of the grandest master would be but as the scraping of a learner. I could—but what am I doing? I am an enthusiast, you are uninterested. I apologize. Pray forgive me."

Beryl bowed very slightly, and looked wearied and impatient.

"I did not want to talk of my work or my project either," he said, resuming. "It is only incidental; though I am so full of it that, like a hen who would lay an egg, I must cackle of it. But, alas, right in the middle of a path stands a difficulty. I am rich in my art, wealthy in my love of my instrument, but poor in my pocket. To storm the world with a musical treatise for a weapon is impossible to the man without means. I am seeking the means."

"Yes. What is the cost of adding a fifth to a fiddle?" asked Beryl, stupidly. "I thought they were cheap."

He glanced sharply at her to see if she were laughing at him, but the cold, impassive, uninterested expression of her face reassured him.

"It is not the cost of the string I am seeking," he said, "but the agents who will take from me the inspiration, and help me to proclaim my idea to the world."

"I am afraid," began Beryl, but he stopped her with a wave of the hand.

"You cannot help me, you would say. But you can, I think, and I hope. Not yourself, not yourself.

Please listen. I have in many parts of the world pupils who have studied under me. It is they I am seeking, to gather them into a company, to touch them with the fire that burns in me, and bind them into a band who shall proclaim everywhere what I wish. Amongst them I had once an English young lady, with soul, fire, enthusiasm, and it is she I am now seeking;" he spoke with much lively gesticulation.

"Excuse me if I say this is nothing to me," said Beryl, stolidly, when he paused. "It is a subject I can take no interest whatever in."

"I am ashamed. I have taken your time without a shadow of reason. I have finished now. I have reason to know that the young lady had some associations here, and that at one time you knew her. She is Miss Crawshay, Miss Lola Crawshay."

"This was what he wanted," thought Beryl, with rapid intuition. "And he had wandered through the maze of his silly story to get at this."

She did not even let her visitor see that she was surprised.

"I have a friend of that name," she said, as with caution. "What then?"

There was no mistaking the gleam of quick, interested delight which passed over the foreigner's face at this, though he hastened to hide it under the mask of overdone gestures.

"That is good news for my violin," he exclaimed.

"But it can't be the same," said Beryl, with her former air of stolid stupidity. "She doesn't play the fiddle at all."

"No, no, that is right. Her instrument is the piano; but her soul is the soul of the heaven-made musician. She lives somewhere here?" he said, with a gesture of

interrogation, in which hands, and arms, and shoulders, and eyebrows all went up together.

"She is the wife of Sir Jaffray Walcote, and is now in America with her husband," answered Beryl, in a commonplace, level tone, without a trace of animation in her face.

But she watched with astonishment the effect of the words.

The man started back in his chair, all the light air which he had assumed dying instantly away, while in place of the mask which he had been wearing, astonishment, disbelief, triumph, and white rage played over his face, and gleamed in the eyes which stared fixedly at her. For the instant the man's true character showed itself unmistakably to the calm eyes which looked at him from the expressionless, wearied, disinterested face.

The moment afterward he was again the actor, cursing himself for having lost his self-control, and speculating angrily whether this dull, stupid, conceited English girl had noticed anything.

So quickly did his expression change that there seemed to be scarcely a pause before he answered, though in a voice which vibrated with the shock of the surprise:

"I should think you may be right, and that this is not the same Miss Crawshay. It could not be, of course. The enthusiast that I knew was living abroad with her father, not thinking of marrying one of your English noblemen."

"Then it must be the same," said Beryl, in the same level tone in which she had struck her first blow. "Lady Walcote only came from the Continent about two years ago."

But he was not to be caught off his guard twice.

"Well, if so, I am more than fortunate. It is great news, grand news. If I can start my mission with the wife of a nobleman at the head of it in England, my cause is already more than half won."

"Her husband is a great lover of music," said Beryl, and she saw that some change in the tone of her voice made him flash one of those keen glances of his right into her eyes. She parried it by assuming a look of languor. "Have you anything more to ask?" and she rose.

Her visitor rose at the same time.

"I thank you very much for the courtesy and kindness with which you have received me, and for the time you have given me," and he bowed with the exaggerated politeness which had irritated Beryl.

"Montreux, I think you said?" she asked, as he reached the door, and his hand was on the handle.

He turned quickly at the question, which he seemed in some way to resent.

"Montreux is my birthplace, Miss Leycester. I am Pierre Turrian, of Montreux, the violin player. That is all my connection with Montreux. My teaching has been elsewhere."

"Oh, I thought you meant you had had Lady Walcote as a pupil there," she replied, as though the point were unimportant.

"Oh, no, no, not at all, not there. It was in Paris, Queen Paris, that I had the pleasure. Oh, no, no. That would be ridiculous. Paris is where I have made my fame, such fame as I possess, not Montreux. That is not of the world at all."

He laughed as he said this with the air of one who would laugh out of existence the cobwebs of an absurdity, and the echo of his laugh had not died away when the door closed behind him.

Beryl went to another room, the window of which commanded a view of the drive, and, herself unseen, watched him as he walked away slowly, like one in thought. Once or twice he turned, stealthily and slyly, to look back at the house; and the girl imagined that, even when he was a long way from the house, she could see on his face the sharp, forbidding, evil, menacing look which had more than once distorted his handsome, cruel features.

Long after he had disappeared amid the small clump of fir trees which fringed both sides of the drive close to the turn of the lodge gates, Beryl remained leaning against the window frame looking out, full of the foreboding which the man's visit had aroused.

Then, being a practical girl of method, she went to her room and wrote out every word that she could remember of the interview, and added her comments and the impressions which had been caused. And she locked the whole away in her most secret and secure hiding place.

The points which stood out most clearly in her mind were that the foreigner, Pierre Turrian, had some very strong motive for finding Lola; that the tale he told about his musical mission was from start to finish a falsehood; that the fact of the marriage of Lola to Sir Jaffray had moved him beyond all power of self-control; that in some way Montreux was mixed up in the matter; and that he had been anxious to learn whether Lola had ever mentioned the name of Turrian to her.

For some days the matter lay like a cloud upon her, and while she was on her visit to her friends she could not dispel it. One incident of that visit served indeed to keep the subject uppermost in her thoughts.

Among the guests was a Frenchman, who was a

noted amateur violinist, and Beryl finding him one evening next to her at dinner, asked him whether he knew the name of Turrian as a violin player.

"Turrian, Turrian?" he repeated. "Where is he known?"

"I believe in Paris," answered Beryl.

"*Ma foi*, there is no such player in Paris," was the decided reply. "I may say I know every player of any consequence in the whole of Paris; but there is none of that name, I am sure."

"Do you know Montreux?" she asked.

"You mean the little Swiss place. I have been there, twice, I think, in my rambles. Do you know it? A curious, dull, pretty place—the sort of little town you can look over from north to south, and west to east, in an hour or two, and carry away as a memory photograph?"

"You never heard the name Turrian there, as that of a violin player?" asked Beryl.

"In Montreux?" and the Frenchman laughed. "Not at all. Poor little Montreux has never distinguished itself yet in producing anything so important as a musician. Wait, wait. What am I saying?" and he laughed heartily. "I have forgotten the mad abbé. You know Montreux? No? Then you will not know of the good Abbé D'Eventin?"

"No, I have never heard of him."

"May I tell you? The good priest had been no one knows what before he entered the Holy Church. But whatever it was, it was something bad, we may be sure. Well, he had picked up a smattering of music, and he could play the violin; and he played it in such a way as to drive himself out of his wits. Then it was that he conceived a great inspiration—he was to revolutionize the world. And how do you think he was to

do it? By adding a fifth string to the violin. Isn't that droll? A fifth string, my faith; poor fellow."

"Is the tale well known at Montreux?" asked Beryl, after joining in her companion's expression of amusement.

"Why, of course. What would you have? Could it be otherwise? Every urchin in the gutter has the story off by heart."

"What a most interesting story," said Beryl, who found much more interest in it than she showed.

It emphasized two points in the tale which the man Turrian had told her.

It showed whence he had stolen the idea for his story about the fifth string; and it suggested that his connection with Montreux was at least as close as Beryl had at first concluded.

But it did not help her to any solution of the chief question as to what was the reason why the man was seeking Lola. It proved that the reason was not what he had said; and that did not carry her far.

It had another effect. Her companion's word had started a thought which afterward developed considerably. As the Frenchman had been speaking of Montreux, Beryl had been struck by the idea that in so small a place it must be exceedingly easy to find out anything about anybody; and from this it was an easy, though gradual, development that in such a place she herself could readily make any necessary inquiries.

That idea did not come for some time, however, and in the meantime Beryl was troubled to know whether she ought to speak to Sir Jaffray's mother, and tell her what had passed in the interview with Pierre Turrian.

There was also the further question as to Lola herself. Ought she to be told?

This was a problem over which Beryl spent many hours of thought.

If there was any evil in the matter, anything which threatened Lola, not for all the world would Beryl have the news of it come through her. It would look all too much like the result of some vindictive feeling on her part.

But on the other hand, if Beryl said nothing and it transpired afterward that the man had been to her, her silence would be open to misconception.

She resolved in the end, therefore, to go to Walcote Manor, and in the course of conversation tell Lady Walcote, as it were casually, of the man's visit, giving his object as described by himself.

On her return home she did this, and suggested further that it might be well to write and tell Lola of the fact.

She described the incident in a way which excited no feeling on Lady Walcote's part except laughter, and it was in this vein that the latter spoke of it in a postscript to a letter to Sir Jaffray. The letter was dispatched to await the baronet and his wife at New York, as the time was drawing near for their return to England.

It was in this way that the warning was sent to Lola that her first husband was alive, and had already hunted her down.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW LOLA HEARD THE NEWS.

The news that Pierre Turrian was alive did not reach Lola at New York, owing to a mischance. Sir Jaffray and she arrived there some days later than they had planned, and not until the evening of the day before that on which they were booked to sail.

The letters were thus thrust away to be read on board the steamer, and in the confusion the postscript was overlooked.

Had she known the news, Lola would have turned back at any risk and have arranged to prolong an experience which had been the brightest of her life.

She had never dreamed that marriage with Sir Jaffray would bring the happiness to her which she had found in it. She had married him from motives which were purely worldly and selfish. She had to make a position; she loved ease and luxury; she was done with love and sentiment; and she chose a husband as a man might choose a profession—because it gave her all that she wanted with the least personal effort and difficulty.

"We women sell ourselves, and she is the shrewdest who fetches the biggest price," had been one of her favorite opinions; and she was glad that she had been able to marry where the man would pay so freely and where he personally was not undesirable.

But she had made one miscalculation in her plans.

She was a woman whose heart was not dead, as she

believed, but rather had never been quickened into life.

She had imagined that she could go through life as a sort of unemotional lay figure by the side of a husband whom she did not love, suffering his caresses and endearments, but not returning them, or, at most, paying with simulated affection for the comforts with which he would surround her. But in her there were no neutral tints. • She must love or hate.

Sir Jaffray's nature fired her, and the more she endeavored to assure herself of her own coldness of heart, the more was she moved by him. The very indifference which she affected helped to overcome her. She could not be indifferent and she could not hate him, and there was therefore but one possible result.

She had chosen, moreover, that kind of holiday which helped to make indifference impossible. She saw her husband at his best during the whole time, and there was no incident of their travel to distract her from him; nothing that caught and held her attention which was not associated closely with him.

More than all, however, he was a man born to be loved by women—strong to command where strength was needed, gentle as a child where gentleness served, as brave as a man can be, and courteous to the point of long suffering. In all bodily exercises he was exceptionally agile and enduring, and he possessed in a marked and extraordinary degree just those qualities which to Lola were the type and embodiment of manhood.

She was bound to yield in time to the forceful influence which he exercised, and the more she perceived this and struggled against it the more irresistible did she find it.

As her feelings softened, so her fears waxed. She

was afraid to grow to love him, because she saw all the dangers of it to her.

One thing she had learned clearly about her husband. With all the stubborn tenacity of his race he held the honor of his name and family as high as a religious creed, and perhaps higher. Straight dealing was an instinct, and deceit and treachery an abomination. She had seen fifty instances of this in the months of the honeymoon; and she was shrewd enough to understand that the deceit which she had practiced he would punish remorselessly, and visit with implacable unforgiveness if he ever discovered it.

His faith once given, was given absolutely; once betrayed, was withdrawn forever.

She did not care while she knew that the tie between them was on her side one of tongue and not of heart. She knew, of course, that in the future, whether Pierre reappeared or not, she would need a clear head and calm judgment to walk safely. But if she grew to love her husband, she would be neither clear in head nor calm in judgment.

So long as she could part from him, if all were discovered, without any loss except such as touched her social position and her money interests, she felt that she could go through all with the certainty of ultimate success.

But if she loved her husband there were a thousand and one complications which might follow, each of which would be a source of undoing.

It was no trouble to her to feign love; to school herself to seem happy in her husband's presence; to be bright and cheerful with him; and to shower upon him a hundred attentions which seemed the spontaneous outcome of a desire to please, but were in reality the

more shrewdly chosen because a clever calculation prompted each and all.

Gradually she was surprised at the ease with which this acting was done and the pleasure which it seemed to give her in the doing; nor did she guess the real source of the pleasure until an incident which happened when they had been away some two or three months revealed the truth to her.

They had ridden into a far outlying town in one of the southern states, and Lola was standing in the street alone waiting for her husband, who had been detained at the place where they had stabled the horses. A couple of drunken rowdies passed, and noticing her beauty, stopped and spoke to her. She took no notice except to glance at them with so much contempt in her expression that one of them lost his temper, and with a deep oath tried to clutch her by the wrist, vowing he'd kiss her for her insolence.

He reckoned without her strength and pluck, however, and as he grasped at her, she pushed him violently backward and struck him with the heavy end of her big riding-whip in the face. He staggered back and measured his length on the roadway, to the intense amusement of his companion, who laughed and swore gleefully.

When he got up, the ruffian was red with rage, and swearing that he would have revenge, approached Lola, who awaited his attack with unflinching courage, eyeing him steadily the whole time. Rendered cautious by his first defeat, he held off for a moment, watching his opportunity, and then with a cunning feint he put her off her guard, and rushed in, pinioned her arms, and held her.

She struggled to free her hands, but the fellow's sinews were too much for her, and she was beginning

to fear that he would overpower her, when she heard him vent a hoarse, guttural, choking sound and saw that Sir Jaffray had come up and caught him by the throat, half strangling him in his fierce temper. The next instant the man was on his back again in the roadway, flung there with great violence by her husband.

"Are you hurt, Lola?" he asked, with the pain of suspense in his eyes.

"No, not in the least. Come away. That brute's getting up again."

The fellow was on his feet again directly, and both he and his companion had drawn their revolvers.

"You don't shoot women in these parts, do you?" said Sir Jaffray, sternly. "Wait. Come, Lola."

He led her away to a house that was open at some little distance, and putting her inside, told her to wait.

"You mustn't go back, Jaffray," she said, a fear that she had never felt for herself awaking on account of him; and she clung to him to keep him by her.

"Don't be afraid," he said, kindly, and putting her hand off his arm with a firm, gentle strength, he went out again. He walked straight up to the bully who had assaulted Lola, and disregarding contemptuously the revolver which the man held threateningly, struck him with his clenched fist a fearful blow in the face, knocking him down with a thud which resounded all across the road. The man lay like a stunned ox. Then Sir Jaffray turned to the companion, but he, seeing what had happened, fired his revolver at random and ran away, swearing.

When Sir Jaffray went back to Lola, he found her more agitated than he had ever seen her, and she did

not seem herself again for many hours, and indeed for days afterward.

He did not understand the cause of it all.

In that instant the revelation had come of the new feeling which was developing in her; and the knowledge, in view of all that it meant, had agitated her as much as any incident in all her turbulent life.

In the days that followed, Sir Jaffray noticed for the first time in his wife a waywardness and uncertainty of temper which were quite unusual, and they surprised and rather grieved him. She was in reality fighting against her new emotions and striving resolutely to conquer them.

But she fought in vain; and from that moment onward she felt herself drawn closer and closer to him until she ceased at last to wage a useless fight.

Her return to England was thus unwelcome. So long as they were thousands of miles away from Europe, she was safe against discovery, and could she have had her way she would have prolonged their journey indefinitely.

But Sir Jaffray was beginning to feel a strong desire to be home. He loved the place, and longed to be there, and to see Lola installed as its beautiful mistress. He would have hurried home earlier had he followed his own inclinations; but he could not interfere to stop the pleasure which she showed on every occasion in all the incidents of their traveling. He was delighted, however, when at length he stood with Lola on the big Atlantic liner and watched the lighthouse at Sandy Hook growing dimmer and dimmer in the haze of distance, and felt that they were homeward bound.

He was surprised that Lola was silent and thoughtful.

It was a new thing for her to feel foreboding.

But now, if what she had begun to dread came true, she felt half helpless to grapple with it. And it was part of the effect of her new love and the fears it bred, that the danger which, when she did not dread its coming had seemed remote and all but impossible, now appeared almost certain and inevitable. She blamed herself for not having taken any of the thousand precautions at the time of Pierre's death which she now saw she ought to have taken, and her father's words recurred to her over and over again:

"You did not see him dead."

How she wished she had!

Sir Jaffray rallied her once or twice when he caught her brooding, apparently.

"Beginning to think what a serious matter marriage is?" he asked. "You'll have no end of fuss made of you in the county. Different from the Wild West."

"I suppose one is quizzed a bit," said Lola. "But I know most of the people, and I can manage them, I think."

"Not much fear of that," replied her husband, with a smile of admiration. "There are not many people you couldn't manage. We shall have to have a function or two, and there'll be a bit of fuss when we get back, I expect. But we won't stop longer than you like at the manor. We'll get up to town. We shall have to go about a bit, you know."

"Yes, marriage isn't an excuse for refusing invitations, as it used to be in Galilee; it makes one look out for them rather."

"There won't be much looking out for them, I promise you. When once you're seen, they'll come fast enough."

"I suppose so, but I'd rather have our time back

there," with a movement of the head toward the West, "than a London season."

"You'll grow out of that fast enough," he said. "But I'm glad you haven't been bored. After all, there's no place like the manor, to my mind. I'm awfully fond of the old place, and, on my word, I go back to it with greater gusto every time I've been away." Then, after a long pause, he added, "I shall like it better than ever with you at its head, Lola, and I think you'll get to feel about it pretty much as I do."

"I shall, if you make it a pleasant place to me," she answered, with a laughing look of affection. "If not, I shall hate it."

"I'll try not to make you do that. I shall be glad when we get there. We're due in to-morrow afternoon, and if all goes as it has hitherto, we shall be well up to time. We shall be home before midnight, all being well. I'm afraid that our getting in at such a time will a bit upset any arrangements which the Walcote people may have made for a reception; but we must have 'em up next day and give 'em a lunch, or a feed of some kind. Wonderful cure for disappointment is a good feed. Jove, I shall be glad to see the old place again."

That night, the last they were to spend on board, the baronet went up on deck to smoke a cigar after supper, and Lola went with him. It was a clear, crisp, sharp air, and the moon and stars were shining brightly. She took his arm, and pressing closely to him walked up and down the deck.

"Our last night at sea, Jaffray," she said.

"And a lovely one, eh?"

"Have you enjoyed the time?"

"Never had a better in my life," he answered, en-

thusiastically. "Didn't know marriage was half so good."

"Or you might have tried it before?" and she laughed.

"If I'd met you before!" he replied, like a lover.

"I'm glad I've given you one span of happiness, Jaffray," she said; and the tone in which she spoke seemed rather sad.

"It seems to have changed you a good bit," he said.

"You're not like the same girl in some ways."

"Not with you?" she put the question in a tone that touched him at once. "I'm the same with you. You forget that till you came into it, mine was a fighting life."

"So that chap must have thought in Calladua," he said, laughing at the recollection of the way she had treated the man who had tried to insult her.

"But you had to come to the rescue then. I wonder if you always would, and will?"

"We don't breed cowboys in old England," he answered.

"True, but there are other villains. Do you believe in omens, Jaffray?" She put the question impetuously.

"Yes, of a kind," he said. "When I've been hunting big game for instance and missed at the first shot, I always took it for an omen that if I didn't hit with the second I should have a bad time. And I took good care not to miss, I can tell you."

"Oh, I don't mean things you can avoid."

"Then, I don't believe in any other. Bad luck don't begin with a man as a rule till he's made a mess of things for himself."

"Yes, but I mean if you fear something's going to happen?"

"But a man don't fear that unless he knows there's something that can happen. A man who walks straight isn't afraid of tumbling into the ditch at the roadside. But once I had a presentiment, by the way, and it came true," he added, after a pause.

"What was that?"

"When I saw you that day in the little woman's house, I had a presentiment that you would be my wife; and here we are."

He laughed pleasantly and pressed her arm; and she thought it wiser to say no more about omens, after what he had said.

Their arrival at Walcote Manor was necessarily very quiet. They reached Liverpool in the afternoon of the following day, and as soon as the baggage could be got together started for home.

Lady Walcote had remained in the house by Lola's special wish—one of the results of the change in her feelings—and Lola did her utmost to follow up the kindlier letters she had written with a greeting of really affectionate warmth.

But the old lady had not changed on her side, and though resolved to act up to the promise she had made to Sir Jaffray before the marriage, she did not like the woman he had chosen and would not pretend that she did.

Thus the home-coming was chilled on the threshold, and Lola herself was both disappointed and irritated; and there was more of the old Ishmaelitish feeling of defiance in her manner than her husband had observed since the marriage.

With Jaffray himself his mother was all tenderness and love; but she felt the change in the position.

It was the first time that he had come home from any of his wanderings when she herself had not had

the first place in his thoughts. If the other woman had been Beryl, she thought, it would have been tolerable; but to give place to Lola was unbearable.

She stayed with them for a long time while they talked to her of their travels, and she listened attentively.

"You have been a good correspondent, Jaffray; better than usual, I think." The baronet had thoughtfully made a point of writing much more frequently than he had been accustomed to write on former occasions. "The letters from you both have been most bright and interesting. You have had all mine, I suppose?"

"Yes, I think so. We got the last batch at New York."

"And what is your theory of the five-stringed violin enthusiast? Is he a lunatic? He has been here, and was most impatient to know when you would be back."

"Five-stringed violin?" exclaimed Sir Jaffray. "What do you mean?"

"There, you haven't read my letters. I told you about him and his queer visit to Beryl."

"Who is he? What is it? I must have missed it?"

"The foreign violin player, M. Pierre Turrian, who has a theory about violins."

"Jaffray, I think I'll go, dear. I'm dead tired," exclaimed Lola, rising the instant Lady Walcote finished. "We must have all the home news in the morning," she added, with a smile.

So it had come—already, she thought, as she went away, with a great pang at her heart, but making no outward sign of any kind.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE ONCE MORE.

That night was one of the hardest in Lola's life, but she faced the crisis with all the strength of her most resourceful character, and came out of it undaunted and determined.

So great was her self-mastery and so strong her powers of acting that Sir Jaffray did not detect a single symptom of the struggle which absorbed her.

Through the night she lay awake, never moving, lest she should wake him and so disturb her own opportunity for thought, and perhaps arouse his suspicions that something was amiss.

There were two courses open to her. One was to tell Sir Jaffray at once the whole matter and trust to his love for her; the other was to face it out and dare the man she hated to do his worst.

If the man at her side had been different, if his sense of honor and morbid fear of the suspicion of dishonor had been less acute, she would have told him all, and trusted to her love to win him to cling to her through the publicity and scandal which would inevitably follow when Pierre was set at defiance.

But she dared not.

She knew that Sir Jaffray, with all the influences that were round him, the strong love of truth that dominated him, the capacity to suffer rather than be touched with a taint of dishonor, would put her away from him at once, and probably never see her again.

The alternative was to face the other man and dare him to do what he pleased.

What would he do?

There was that scene on the Devil's Rock—but there was no proof of what she had done. Besides, if there were, what did it matter? If she was to be dragged from the place to which she had climbed, what did it matter how far she fell? A little deeper would make no difference.

Need she fall at all? That was the question.

She knew Pierre well; had seen through and through his sordid little soul—and could count up easily enough the price that would buy him. Comfort, ease, luxury, money for his vices. These were his ambitions; and she could satisfy him. Sir Jaffray had settled on her an ample dowry, and she could easily get more money if she wanted it.

She would go through with it. Face it as she had faced her troubles and fight them down, and so great was her fighting instinct that though she knew the whole happiness of her life would be at stake, the excitement of the prospect was not altogether unpleasant.

In the early hours of the morning she fell asleep, and Sir Jaffray, waking in the gray light, found her sleeping quietly and peacefully, with a slight flush tinting her cheeks such as he had seen when she was excited and pleased.

When she went down to breakfast she was quite herself; alert, vigilant, resourceful, high spirited, and so suggestive of strength of will and purpose that Sir Jaffray noticed it and was pleased.

He put it down to her being at home at the manor: "Seems to have done you good to get home, Lola,"

he said. "You're not the same woman you were on the boat. Where are your omens?" He smiled.

"Where, indeed?" she replied, laughing back. "I'm afraid I must have been upset by the voyage. Perhaps I thought I was going to be shipwrecked. But I'll be safe here, eh?" There was more in her words than he understood.

"You ought to be, if anywhere," he answered.

"Even if I manage to offend the very great personages who come here?"

"You won't do that. People aren't easy to take offense with Walcote."

"Where's the mother—Lady Walcote? I suppose I may call her mother?"

"She's not coming down to breakfast. She's not used to our wild west early rising; besides, she was up late. She'll be down to lunch."

"Did you sit up late? I was horribly tired. I couldn't stay. What was that she was saying about some ridiculous musician or other and a five-stringed violin?"

"Bit of a crank, I fancy," said Sir Jaffray, laughing. "Said he wanted some rot or other about a violin, and that you'd been his pupil or something years ago. Turrian his name is. Do you remember him?"

Lola laughed musically and showed her white, level teeth.

"What, Pierre Turrian? Oh, do tell! as our friends across the water say. I wish I'd stopped up to hear. Remember him? Of course. He's only a young man; fair, and would be handsome if he hadn't a curious expression on his face which I couldn't like. He's a wonderful fiddler—wonderful. A genius with more than a touch of madness. But a wonderful player."

She spoke as unconcernedly as if she were discussing a servant.

"Where did you know him?"

"Switzerland. Soon after I left the convent. He taught me singing when there was some talk about my using my voice, you know." She had told him that at one time her father had thought of putting her on the stage, but that she had refused to go—a version of the fact that was not accurate—and a mere reference to this subject was generally enough to turn him from any awkward discussion.

"Were you under him long? Did he know that you were thinking of that?"

"No, of course not," she answered, when he paused, taking her cue from his hesitation. "The thing never went far enough for that. He knew no more than that I had a voice that was to be trained, and he trained it. He is a good singer as well as player. You'll hear him in all probability. By the way, I shall have to get to work and practice; our wanderings haven't given me much time for singing," and with that she turned the subject.

She had produced the impression she wished upon Sir Jaffray's mind; and had further prepared the way for Pierre Turrian's coming to the house, should he insist upon doing that, as she thought very likely.

But she had still to deal with Lady Walcote, and during the time she was going round the house and stables and the grounds and the conservatories with Sir Jaffray she was thinking out how best to meet his mother.

She commenced with an attack from her own side, skillfully planned and executed.

She found the old lady sitting alone in the morning-room, and she went up and kissed her with a show of

much warmth. Then drawing a low chair, she sat down by her.

"Good morning, mother! I may call you mother?" she asked, looking into the elder woman's rather stern eyes.

"Jaffray's wife can be nothing but my daughter, Lola," she answered.

The girl paused, and then said slowly and thoughtfully.

"I could wish that there was less diplomacy in that answer, and more warmth in the tone," and she sighed. "I have never had a mother, remember."

"I know very little indeed of your childhood, Lola. You have never told me anything, you know," was Lady Walcote's answer.

"It is hard to give confidence where there is no sympathy," said Lola.

"As hard as to give sympathy where no confidence is offered, child."

The girl sighed and raised her hand, and let it fall on her lap as if with a gesture of disappointment.

"I want to find love in the Manor House," she said, after a pause, looking up into Lady Walcote's face, "and you offer me—this," dropping her voice, but keeping her eyes fixed steadily on her companion's face.

The old lady returned the look with one quite as steady.

"What do you mean, Lola?"

"That I want to love you and you to love me; and in place of that you meet me with diplomatic answers and neatly turned retorts. Is that all the welcome you have for me? Is that what our relations are always to be? Can Jaffray bring us no nearer than that?"

It was a subtle plea, and for a moment went unanswered.

Then taking the girl's hand with a more kindly action than she had yet shown, Lady Walcote said:

"I, too, wish to love Jaffray's wife, Lola; but love is not a thing to be driven and constrained, and if you do not find me so warm as you wish, you shall at least find me quite frank. I have been glad to have your letters, and to see in them the little overtures which I thought I could detect. I thank you for your thoughtfulness, child, in urging me not to leave the manor, and I have stayed, as you see, for the time. To see how we get on. It is an experiment; no more."

"Why need we doubt the result?"

"There are many reasons, but I will give you one—one that is from my side. You know that I had cherished other plans for Jaffray's marriage; that for years past it had been the strong desire of our family that Jaffray should marry his cousin; that Beryl has always been like a daughter of my own; and that the project was infinitely dear to me. We old people do not easily pluck out from the heart a desire of this kind, which has struck such deep roots there as this in mine; and I have yet to see how the old manor will seem to me with another in Beryl's place."

"That is very hard for me to hear," said Lola, after a long pause.

"It is not meant for hardness; only to tell you frankly what I feel, so that you may know the full truth as to my feelings."

Lola sighed, and, rising from her low chair, walked to the window and looked out; and there was a long silence in the room.

She was disappointed at Lady Walcote's attitude, and began to regret that under the circumstances she

had ever yielded to a gentler impulse to try and appease her, by getting her to stop at the manor, and so win her affection.

It would be an infinite complication if she was to have this sharp, clever, suspicious old woman in the house, while the trouble with Pierre was being settled. But at present her only course was to try and win her round; if that failed, and she grew to be in the way, a quarrel must be fastened on her which would drive her away.

She was not long making her decision, and she went back and sat down again, close to the old lady, though not in the same chair she had sat in before.

If she was to win it would be by her wits, and not by her witchery.

"If you reject my love, then," she said, "how are we to stand toward one another? You have scarcely thought what the effect of your words must be on me. You make me feel that I am something like an interloper in my husband's home, and to Jaffray's mother. Is that what you mean? Do you wish me to be uncomfortable at the thought that I am not Beryl Leicester, and that I did not steel my heart against your son, as his mother had steeled hers against me?"

"I have not steeled my heart against you, Lola. God forbid that I should do anything so wicked. I have tried to open it to you."

"And you have failed. That is even harder to bear still. I will tell you why. I have never had a woman friend in all my life, except my Aunt Villyers—and the woman who is not loved by woman grows hard. Still, let it be as you will. I am no pleader for the impossible. You tell me in signs that are plainer than words, that you cannot love me; and remember that it is you who have laid the foundations of what may

be a wall of division between us. Remember, too, that I gave you my word I would never marry your son unless you yourself said yes. Never forget that, whatever may come. You say it is hard for the old to pluck from the heart a cherished desire. But it is harder for one like me to step out from the heaven which the love of such a man as Jaffray opened to me. Yet this I would have done had you bidden me, as I pledged you."

Then with a swift change of manner, as though carried away by one of her uncontrollable impulses, Lola threw herself on her knees at Lady Walcote's feet, seized her hand, and pressed it between her own, and looked with tear-touched eyes into her face as she said:

"Cannot our love for him and his love for us make us one, mother? Think how it would sweeten his life!"

It was the shrewdest of all pleas, and as once before it had prevailed, so now it wrought powerfully on the mother's heart.

She bent and kissed Lola on the lips, her own quivering slightly.

"You are right, child," she murmured. "We should be held together in his love. Forgive me if I have pained you."

While they were in the act of the embrace, the door was opened quickly by Sir Jaffray. He stood on the threshold right well pleased with what he saw, for his great desire was that his mother and Lola should be on the closest terms.

Not wishing to disturb them, he was going away without a word when Lola called him. She was quick to see the desirability of getting confirmed in his presence what Lady Walcote had said.

"Come to the mother, Jaffray," she said, "and hear what we have been doing. We have just been con-

cluding a great treaty of love and peace. Give me your hand."

She laughed very softly and sweetly, while her eyes shone brightly with the light of happiness, and holding one of the mother's hands in hers, and taking one of Sir Jaffray's, she placed all three in one clasp.

"Now we are all unconventional people, thinking of nothing but our three selves, and we two, the mother and I, have made a great compact that the love we both bear you, and the love you bear to both of us, is to bind us together always in a love for each other. Kiss us both, Jaffray, in witness of it all, and then let us all three promise to do whatever lies in our power to make that compact the chief corner stone of our lives. Is not that right, mother?"

Sir Jaffray stooped, and kissed them both.

"It's the best news you could give me, mother," he said, when he kissed Lady Walcote. "You know that;" and the earnestness of his tone proved to her what he felt.

"It is true, Jaffray," she said. "It shall be so with me."

Then Lola, knowing that if the scene lasted a moment too long its sentiment would be spoiled, jumped up quickly, and said, lightly:

"Now, we can be again the great people of Walcote Manor, who ought not to be troubled with hearts and feelings and passions. Sir Jaffray," she cried, assuming a very grand air, "will you give me your arm? I will take the air in the park. We will leave the lady mother to her thoughts."

"Come on, Lola," cried the baronet, and they went out of the room together, laughing.

And the chief thoughts of the "lady mother" were that her son's wife was an exceedingly clever young

woman, whose wits were as sharp as her face was beautiful.

During the next few days she had ample evidence of this, as Lola's treatment of Lady Walcote was tactful and clever to a degree, and the old lady, despite her sharpness, and shrewdness, and tendency to suspicion when she was alone, could not resist the girl's charm when they were together. Thus the intimacy between them ripened quickly enough to surprise and please Lola herself, who wished that it should be as close as possible by the time that the blow fell which she was daily expecting.

It came all too quickly.

She had been home less than a week, and had ridden over one morning with Sir Jaffray to a county meeting at a town a few miles away, when, on her return, she was told that a gentleman was waiting to see her.

She knew without glancing at the card who it was.

She had nerved herself to be always ready for the meeting, however; and without staying to change her habit, she went at once to the library, where the visitor was waiting.

There was not a sign of embarrassment on her face or in her manner as she passed the servant and entered the room, and no one could have detected even a quiver in her voice as she went up to the man whom she hated with a deadly loathing, and said as quietly as to a stranger:

"You wish to see me, I understand. What is it?"

Pierre Turrian waited in silence until the servant had closed the door, and they stood thus looking steadily into each other's eyes.

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CHAPTER IX.

PIERRE TURRIAN'S SCHEME.

The two stood looking straight at one another for some time after the servant had closed the door and left them alone, and Pierre Turrian was the first to break the silence.

He turned from her, and looking all round the room and then glancing back at her, a smile parted his lips and he raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders as he said, in a tone of mock praise:

"You've done well for yourself, Lola. A very lovely cage for a very pretty bird; very lovely, indeed;" and he emphasized his words by another comprehensive glance round the room. "You're a devilish clever woman."

Lola assumed an expression of indignant surprise.

"I don't know what you mean, sir," she said, drawing herself up. "I was told by my servants that a M. Turrian wished to see me, and I have understood from my friends that that person is a foreign musician who wishes to interest me in some musical scheme. When I heard you were here, I concluded that that was now your object, and I came at once to see if I could help you. But it seems I have been mistaken; and you have found your way into my house to offer me some kind of insult. I wish you to understand, sir, that I am here in my own home, surrounded by my own servants, who will know how to treat the man who insults their mistress."

She looked at him with resolute defiance.

He started as she spoke and looked first angry and then amused.

"Devilish good, no doubt; but not good enough," he said, with an oath and a laugh. "One might think that you and I had never met before—on the Devil's Rock, for instance."

"You are apparently under some strange delusion. I have never seen you before in my life," she said, firmly, "and so long as you hold to any delusion to the contrary I decline absolutely to speak to you."

"You are a magnificent liar!" he exclaimed, "and I know what you mean. I don't consent. I want my wife and I'll claim her."

"I know nothing about your wife, no more than about you. If that is all you have to rave about, you will please not to come here again, or my servants will refuse you admission by my express orders. If, on the contrary, there is any business I can help you with, I shall be ready to do what lies in my power."

"Do you mean that you dare to deny you are my wife?"

"Absolutely. You are mad to think of it. I am Lady Walcote, the wife of Sir Jaffray Walcote, and though I have heard of you as a fiddler"—she spoke the words contemptuously—"and may have had a lesson or two from you in singing or music, in any real sense I have never seen you before in my life."

The splendid audacity of her manner almost took away his breath. He was prepared for any other reception than this.

"You are a devil!" he exclaimed, in French. Then added, in English, "Do you mean that you were not married to me in Montreux four years ago, and that you haven't traveled half over the Continent with me as my wife?"

"That is precisely what I mean," returned Lola, coldly, firmly, and deliberately. "Precisely. It is quite ten years since I was in Montreux, and I traveled with my poor dear father alone up to the time of his death in Neuchatel, two years ago. Obviously you have made some surprising mistake."

"You are mad," he cried. "You can't set me at defiance. I have proofs—ample, undeniable, complete—that you are my wife."

"Proofs? Of what?" she answered, more quickly. "Proofs that you married some one else in my name, maybe. Bring the priest who ever made me your wife, and then talk of proofs."

"You devil, you know he's dead! But I can bring a thousand people to swear to you. Beauty like yours, my girl, can't hide itself or be forgotten. But what better proof is wanting than this—that you stand here bandying words with me over a matter of this kind?"

"You recall me to myself. I have been too indulgent to one whom I was led to believe was mentally afflicted. I will listen no longer. If you repeat the slanderous tale that you have told I will have you pitched neck and crop out of the house and kicked down the drive. Do you understand me? Now, what do you say?"

"You are my wife, and I have come to claim you," was the reply, sullenly and doggedly spoken.

"You make your own choice. In one minute after I ring that bell the servant will be here, and if you have not retracted that slander before he comes I will order him to turn you out of the house."

"You are my wife," he answered, between his clenched teeth.

Lola crossed the room in silence and pulled the bell vigorously.

Then she turned toward her companion, with resolution in every line of her beautiful face. She said not another word, but watched him closely.

The color waned gradually from his face, and he moved restlessly once or twice. Then he bit his lip and then his nails, and eyed the girl angrily.

"What terms do you offer?" he said.

"I make no terms with slanderers," she answered, steadily, in the same deliberate, half-contemptuous tone in which she had spoken before; though a feeling of intense relief and joy shot into her heart as she saw that she was beating him in her desperate move. "Do you retract the infamous slander you have uttered?"

"You are the devil," he cried again in French.

At that moment the servant opened the door.

"Well?" said Lola, turning to her visitor while the man waited for orders.

"I retract," he said, rolling out the words in French.

"Oh, of course," said Lola, as if he had mentioned the name of some wine. "Bring some claret, Dalling, and biscuits."

While the man was gone for the wine neither of them spoke, and Lola remained standing by the fireplace, flushed with a sense of triumph at having won the first move in the game, and thinking steadily what to do next.

She knew her antagonist through and through. Sheer dogged force was the only weapon that would beat him down and hold him in subjection. The slightest sign of weakness on her part, the faintest signal of fear, would make him strong at once. It was only by making him believe she did not fear the con-

sequences of his saying all he knew and claiming her, that she could hope to win.

But she knew also that she must allow him a certain amount of license. Within the limits she laid down, he must do what he liked, go where he liked, and say what he liked, and above all he must be well paid.

Thus she saw that the attitude which she had adopted almost on the spur of the moment, and in obedience to something like an instinct, was capable of being used with easy advantage; and she resolved that if possible the terms should be arranged before he left the house. But she was prepared for an outbreak beforehand.

He was a man who was sure to try and cover his defeat in a torrent of threats as to what he could and might be driven to do.

He broke out in this vein almost as soon as the man had left the room after returning with the wine.

"I suppose you rather plume yourself on having beaten me, don't you? And you think that because I pretended to retract just now, you can play with me as you please. Let me tell you one thing first. I'll be quite open with you. My retraction is simply and solely for a time; because, my faith"—this with a shrug of the shoulders and an attempted light laugh—"because it suits me better for the time. But, mark me, only for the time!"

"It will be simpler and quite as effective with me," answered Lola, contemptuously; "if you will string all your threats together into one long sentence and get it off like a child says its lesson. The project of yours concerning the scheme in connection with the violin, for which, as I understand, you want considerable

money help, is a much more material and practical subject for an interview of this kind."

Pierre Turrian rose abruptly from the low easy chair where he had been sitting, and began to walk up and down the room, moving his head from side to side, and shrugging his shoulders and gesticulating.

Then drawing a cigarette case from his pocket he turned to her and held it out to her.

"Does Lady Walcote"—pausing on the words, and laughing—"object to smoke? Perhaps she herself smokes. I have here some cigarettes of the kind my wife"—with another quick, significant glance to her—"used to like. Will you try one?"

He held it open to her with an impudent leer on his fair, handsome face.

"I take no interest whatever in what your wife used to like or dislike," returned Lola, with an expression of absolute indifference. "If you wish to smoke you have permission," with a wave of the hand.

"My faith, but you are magnificent, sublime!" he exclaimed in French.

Then he lighted a cigarette, and drawing in the smoke with the relish of an inveterate smoker, he went on walking up and down the room.

Presently he stopped again, and standing close to her he said:

"It is no wonder that I mistook you for my wife. This is just as I can conceive her acting in just such circumstances. She is a magnificent actress, and I have seen her fool men, aye, to the very top of their bent. But there she differs from you, madam," and he bowed low with an assumption of gallantry, "for she is the most extraordinary and unabashed liar that ever—married two men in one name."

He shot another glance of swift cunning at her, and laughed.

"I have already told you that I take not the slightest interest in anything that concerns your wife, though I am ready to discuss your scheme, if that is what you want."

"But my scheme, even if it satisfies me to-day, may not be enough for me to-morrow. What then?"

"I do not understand you, and do not choose to try."

"I mean that the purchase price of my scheme and all the comfort that the success of it may bring to me will cease to satisfy me one day, and that then I may carry out another purpose which has brought me to England."

"I don't ask you what your purpose is, and I take no interest in it. But if it be strong enough to cause you to give up the ease and comfort which your scheme may bring you, and drive you to step out into that hard, barren, working world, which I should imagine to be particularly distasteful to you, it will be a matter of surprise to me. But it will be a matter for you to decide, of course. If you like to beggar yourself for a whim, I should not think anyone will care. I, least of all," and Lola looked all the defiance which her words conveyed.

"That is not true. You do care," he said, angrily, waving the hand which carried the cigarette between the fingers.

Lola shrugged her shoulders in response, and said nothing.

"You play the game as if you held all the winning cards," he exclaimed again, angrily. "As if I could not with a word strip you of all this fine house, have you bundled into the street for an impostor, and made the mark of every lout and loon in the miserable vil-

lage yonder. I can do this and more, as you know; I can brand you with the hot iron of shame, and haul you to the dock for a bigamist. And you know it well enough, for all your bravado."

She was glad he had broken out thus. It gave her an opportunity to drive home a point which she wanted to make.

"I thought you had retracted that scandal," she answered, coldly and sternly. "I am quite prepared if you are to put that to the uttermost test. Even if all you said were true," and she looked him straight in the eyes, "I would not falter for the space of a second. Even if it were true, all that you could do would never bring back to your side such a woman as you describe your wife to be. You might drive her from any position she now chances to hold, you might even, as you say, put her in the dock. But how would that either benefit you or bring her nearer to you? If she is such a woman as you say, she is much more likely to face the world without you, or getting freed from you to marry again. No, no, M. Turrian," and she laughed, easily and lightly. "Take my advice as a disinterested party, and stick to the musical scheme which promises you ease and comfort without risk."

She paused, and when he made no immediate answer, she added:

"It is weary work to fight a dangerous and determined woman, you know, and from what you say that is what your wife seems to be."

He took no notice of this, but walked up and down slowly, smoking vigorously, and inhaling and puffing out the light blue smoke of the cigarette with much vehemence.

"I am inclined to agree with you," he said, at length, "though I get to the same point by a very dif-

ferent route. I can conceive that I might in the way you mention work out a very pretty revenge. If my wife, for instance, who is in a position to help me with this scheme, to help me with money, you understand," and he flashed a glance at her as he turned his head a moment in passing, "with money, I could make my life what you call it, one of ease and comfort. And I could do more," here his voice sunk and his utterance became slow and deliberate, and he rolled some of the words as if the mere utterance of them gave him acute pleasure—"could watch her, holding over her the knowledge that I could crush her at any moment with a single word. I could let her live her chosen life, bear children, maybe, to the man whom she has fooled, and then I could snip the thread of the jewel-hilted sword which she has hung up over her own life, and stab the whole of her dupes in the very marrow of their honor and self-esteem. I could play that part."

"But she could kill you first," cried Lola, maddened by the cruelty of his words.

He stopped and looked at her and smiled coldly.

"I thought you took no interest in anything that concerns my wife," he said, raising his eyebrows, shrugging his shoulders and flourishing his hands.

"Personally, I do not. But were I that woman, I would take your life."

"She tried once; but I am not easy to kill." The expression on his face was repulsive in its leering, malicious triumph.

"Well, you can take your choice. I am indifferent what you do. Only remember what I have said."

At that instant the door was opened, and Sir Jaffray came in, boisterously and noisily, as was his wont.

"Hullo, Lola," he cried. "I got away much sooner

than I expected. You might have waited for me. Ah, is 'his M. Turrian? I heard he was here."

Lola introduced the two men, and each scanned the other very closely, though the Frenchman made his scrutiny furtively.

"I have been explaining to Lady Walcote, whom I had the honor to know slightly some years ago as a pupil, a most distinguished and apt pupil, the object of my being now in England."

"Well, what is it?" asked the baronet, half carelessly, standing by his wife's side and linking his arm in hers.

"I am writing what I think will be a great treatise on the violin. The violin is my instrument, you know, and I want to urge some changes, but I want to do more than merely write. I want to organize a band of violin players who will show the world the real beauties of the change I propose."

"Seems rather a fantastic sort of mission," said the baronet. "Has M. Turrian been explaining the thing in detail to you?" and he glanced at Lola's habit, as if asking why the interview had been so long.

The Frenchman answered:

"Yes, madame has listened to me with great patience, and, indeed, if I may say so, has entered very sympathizingly into my plans, and has even made some suggestions on which I shall act." He shot a quick glance at Lola as he said this; "And I think she has made me more of a convert to her views of the matter than I her to mine. I think you would be interested in the scheme, Sir Jaffray, if I were to tell you the whole of it."

"All right," laughed Sir Jaffray. "If it pleases my wife it'll be pretty certain to please me. Come and explain it at length this evening, and bring your vio-

lin. I'm a bit of a fiddler myself. At least I like it, though I'm only a scraper at it."

"At what time do you dine?"

"Eh? Oh," and the baronet swallowed a laugh at what he considered the Frenchman's "cheek" at fishing for an invitation to dinner. "Half-past seven. Yes, it'll be better; come in to dinner. You can do the talking then, and the playing afterward. Eh, Lola?"

"Yes, if you like," she answered.

"A bit of a crank, I should think," said the baronet, when M. Turrian had gone, "but not a bad sort, and if he's clever with the fiddle I shall be glad enough to hear him."

"Oh, he's clever enough," replied Lola, quietly, who was thinking of the crisis that had passed that morning, and of the mass of intrigue which was seething and boiling and tumbling right under her very feet, concealed only by the thin cover of the home life at the manor. How she cursed the day when she had first fallen into the griping, cruel hands of Pierre Turrian.

CHAPTER X.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

Pierre Turrian amply justified the opinion as to his cleverness which Lola expressed to Sir Jaffray, for in a few weeks he succeeded in making himself a welcome guest at Walcote Manor.

Sir Jaffray, who had at first been led to think of him as a sort of musical "crank," and had tolerated him as a comparatively harmless individual who could sing with exquisite taste and play brilliantly, discovered one by one his other qualities, just as the astute Frenchmen thought it judicious to reveal them.

He could be an excellent companion, having a rare capacity of adapting himself to his surroundings; he had a great knowledge of men, picked up in the course of his wanderings over all Europe; he possessed an endless fund of anecdotes, with a clever knack of inventing them to suit any occasion and time and company; and as he speedily and accurately gauged the baronet's character, he was able to make himself welcome in half a hundred ways.

Gradually the "musical fad," as Sir Jaffray began to call it laughingly, was allowed to fall more and more out of sight until it was rarely mentioned, and Sir Jaffray came to the conclusion that, as the Frenchman seemed to have plenty of money, it had been taken up as a sort of hobby, and was to be dropped as easily.

"'The Professor' seems to have developed under our influence, Lola," he said one day to his wife; they

spoke of him as "the professor" as a term of friendship. "Wonder what made him take up that fifth string rot. Glad he's shed that rubbish."

"He seems a man of impulses," replied Lola, "and I wish an impulse would take him back to Switzerland." She was very restless at the growing intimacy between the two men, and had striven against it. But the Frenchman had beaten her.

"I can't say that," replied Sir Jaffray, laughing. "I like him. He's one of the jolliest beggars I ever met. One of the few men I've ever known who can lose his coin without getting raggy." The Frenchman had been shrewd enough to let the baronet always have just the best of matters in every game and sport in which they met. "When we come back from town, we must have him here. He'd be the life and soul of a house party—those deadly plagues of the country."

"We can hardly have him here then, can we?"

"Why not? The women'll go mad after him. I'd give a lot to see the little De Witt setting those wicked little wits of hers to work to catch him for her snuggery;" and he laughed again.

The idea of that sharp little woman watching the incidents of the drama that was being played at the manor was the reverse to pleasant to Lola, but she said nothing, lest she should arouse some sort of suspicion.

The baronet was as good as his word, and in a flush of good feeling one day, he gave the Frenchman a general invitation to stay at the manor as soon as Lola and himself should return from London.

When Lola heard of it she was angry and took an opportunity of speaking to M. Turrian about it.

"You must not accept that invitation," she said, peremptorily.

"No?" And he stopped and looked at her with his eyebrows raised. They were walking on the terrace before dinner, and he was smoking a cigarette.

"No. I say no," said Lola, energetically.

"And why not?"

"Because I don't choose to allow it."

"That is not a tactful reason," he said, with a shrug and a laugh.

"I care nothing about tact. You must not do it. If you do, I shall stop your allowance."

"That is coarse. We may be—criminals, but at least we should be polite," and he bowed with affected courtesy. "Give me your real reasons," he continued, after a pause. "If it is only your pique, I shall not pay the slightest heed to it. You chose this life, not I. I did not like it at first. I have grown accustomed to it, and I find it pleasant enough—for a time, while my plans develop and—" bowing again—"I shall live it in my own way."

"There are people coming here who may remember a certain notorious gambler and cheat who was at one time known in half the hells in Europe."

"Ah, that is most interesting and most enticing. If there is one thing that I do not like about this existence, it is what you call its hum-drum, dead-alive sameness and respectability. A man rusts in such a place. There is no risk, no danger, where people's wits are so stupid as here. Why, even a murderess might live here all her life unsuspected; while as for bigamists, they would find it a perfect haven of rustic rest." He paused, and glanced at her, but Lola took no notice of his words, and he resumed. "But what you promise me now is just the one touch that is

wanted to make life life, and worth living. You, at any rate, must see that such a place is most admirably adapted for that form of your English virtue of self-denial, which consists in denying your own identity. If others can do this, why not I?" and he laughed with malicious glee.

"I tell you you must not come to stay in this house. You shall not," said Lola, vehemently.

"Pardon me, madame," and his shoulders went up and his hands spread out as he bowed again; "but I most assuredly shall."

"You shall not. At any hazard," said Lola very firmly, when she was interrupted by Sir Jaffray, who said with a good-natured laugh—

"Hullo, you two. I hope you're not quarreling there because the violin mission isn't getting forward."

Pierre Turrian turned and laughed gayly.

"No, no, Lady Walcote and I are, I trust, too old friends to quarrel over that. Her energy is all friendliness. I was telling her that you had asked me to come here after your return from town, and I was explaining to her that I am going on the Continent for a while to perfect a plan which is often in my thoughts; and she was insisting that I should not break off my arrangements there in order to return here—because in some slight respects the two things might rather clash. But I assured her that I could not think of letting any other considerations interfere with the pleasure of a visit here. Of that I am determined; but Lady Walcote is too solicitous on my behalf."

"Oh, of course, you'll come if you can, professor," said Sir Jaffray. "I should be sorry if you didn't. I'm glad you two weren't at loggerheads. I want you to be friends, you know."

"I trust we shall never misunderstand one another

more than we do at present," and the Frenchman bowed, and shot a swift, cunning look at Lola, which stung her like a poisoned barb. "What say you, madame?" he asked softly and courteously, and Lola hated herself and her accomplice at being driven into this course of loathsome deception of the man she loved.

The moment after, she turned and left them. She was sick of the part she had to play.

She began to feel already that in attempting to guide events to suit her own purposes, she had undertaken a task which might lead to infinitely greater trouble than that she was striving to avoid, and this fear led her to associate the idea of coming disaster with this visit of Pierre's to the manor.

While she and Sir Jaffray were in London and the Frenchman was absent, the feeling wore away; but as the time for the return to Walcote approached, it came back again, and could she have had her choice she would have taken Sir Jaffray right away out of Europe for another long tour, such as that which had made their honeymoon so pleasant.

But Sir Jaffray would not hear of it. He was anxious to spend the late summer and autumn at Walcote; he longed to see Lola at the head of his splendid old home, and he was keenly anticipating the shooting. Thus he left London full of the most pleasurable anticipation.

Sir Jaffray and Lola were alone in the house for two or three days before any of the guests came, and during that time Lola struggled against the presentiment of evil which depressed her. But she could not shake it off, and as the day approached on which Pierre Turrian was to arrive, she grew dull and moody and even irritable.

She had done all that she dared to prevent his com-

ing to stay in the house; and the idea of it both angered and disgusted her. She had entered on the deception without at all realizing the constant association with lies which it necessitated.

She shrank from having the two men under the same roof. She had expected that Pierre would have taken her money, and after staying perhaps a short time at Walcote, would have gone away to the Continent, back to that disreputable, roaming life which he had always lived. She could have borne that. But this constant association with him, his presence in the house, and the life of continuous deceit and lying which it forced upon her, made her sin against the man she loved so patent, so flagrant, so ever present and pressing, that she began to repent that she had ever chosen the path of deceit.

Sir Jaffray caught her in one of her fits of moodiness on the day when Pierre Turrian arrived. Mrs. De Witt and Beryl were also in the house. Sir Jaffray had surprised Lola with her mask off just before dinner. He crept up to her quietly, and running his arm round her waist, kissed her.

"What's the matter, Lola?" he asked, gently. "You look sad or ill, and both are strange for you. Though I've seen you so two or three times lately. Is anything up?"

To his consternation she burst into tears. He had never seen her do such a thing before, and he did not know what to do.

Like everything with her, her grief was violent, stormy, and passionate, but it soon passed.

"I am a fool," she cried. "A child, frightened by a shadow. If I were to tell you, you would laugh or be angry."

"See if I should," he said, kindly. "Tell me."

Her husband looked at her thoughtfully.

"A shadow that seems to be ahead, often looms up out of the past," he said.

The remark put her on her guard in a moment.

"Partly the past, partly the present, and partly the future," she replied. "I have never played the hostess on such a scale as I shall have to here in a few days, and I think the prospect of it unnerves me."

"Is that all?" There was something in his tone which made her feel he did not quite accept the answer, and he took his arm away from round her waist. "You are a creature of moods, Lola," he continued, thoughtfully, "and I sometimes think that some of the things in your past life which you have never told me, depress you."

"Why do you think there is anything I have not told you?"

"You have told me very little."

"There is only little to tell," she replied, surprised at his words, for he had never pressed her as to any incident of her life with her father; "and certainly nothing not to tell." Her quickness to read in his words a suggestion of doubt roused her into an attitude of defense.

He noticed the change, and he stooped and kissed her.

"When I doubt you, child, I will tell you so openly. I am with you and for you against the world."

She answered his caress impulsively, and threw her arms round him, and kissing him passionately, exclaimed:

"Ah, Jaffray, I think sometimes I should be a happier woman if I did not love you as I do."

"Happier if you did not love me?" he questioned,

and smiled. "That is a puzzle I can't read. Would you rather that I did not love you, then?"

"Ah, no, no. I would rather you killed me by the cruelest of deaths," and she clung to him.

"Then you are a problem I can't solve," he answered, laughing. "But a problem that is very dear to me, solved or unsolved."

While they were thus love-making, the first of the dinner gongs sounded, and they had to hasten away to dress.

Then at dinner an incident happened which disturbed Lola profoundly, and marked the beginning of the end.

They had only three guests, Mrs. De Witt, Beryl Leycester, and Pierre Turrian, and at dinner Lola saw that the Frenchman was taking a good deal of wine. The conversation turned on what each of those present had been doing during the past few weeks; and presently Lola saw him set down his glass with an expression which she knew well boded mischief to someone, and look in her direction furtively out of the corner of his eyes. Then he broke into the conversation in a tone which drew the attention of all to him.

"My faith, but I have had an experience, or rather have heard of one which is, if you like, uncommon."

"About fiddle-strings?" asked Mrs. De Witt, mischievously.

"No, madame, about human lives, and about something which I am sure you could not comprehend—woman's faithlessness."

"I have heard of it," said the little woman, innocently. "But if it is anything too dreadful, don't spoil it by telling us too hurriedly—keep it for by and by, in the drawing-room."

"Out with it, man," exclaimed the baronet.

"It is the story of a friend of mine," said the Frenchman, pausing a moment to emphasize his next remark. "Do you know the Devil's Rock in the Swiss mountains? Do you, Lady Walcote?" he asked, when the others said nothing.

Something in the tone made Beryl Leycester look up, and she saw that Sir Jaffray's wife was on the defensive.

"The Devil's Rock, the Devil's Rock," replied Lola, repeating the words as if waiting for the name to strike some chord of recollection, and speaking very naturally. "I seem to have heard of it, and yet—you know how one's memory will play tricks—I really can't say," and she smiled very sweetly.

"It is well named at any rate," said M. Turrian. "Imagine a semicircular background of rough steep crags, with here and there thick dark firs and pines on them, and in the middle a sharp pinnacle rock, standing sheer and grim and solitary, joined to the background by a narrow path, each side of which is a precipice stretching down hundreds of feet to the bottom of the gorge. That is the Devil's Rock, and the precipice might be called in truth the mouth of hell."

"But what has the devil to do with woman's faithlessness?" asked Mrs. De Witt, with a smile.

"More than usual," returned the Frenchman, laughing dryly. "There was murder done on that very spot—murder, so far as intent was concerned, and my friend was the victim. I went to the place last month with him."

"I'm getting a bit mixed, professor," said the baronet.

"My friend was married to a woman who seems to have got the idea of freeing herself from him. She

took him to that place one day, told him she had ceased to love him, and that she meant to leave him."

"What a very conventional creature," exclaimed Mrs. De Witt. "She was, of course, a woman of the middle classes."

"Scarcely conventional, madame," said M. Turrian. "She goaded him with some hot, bitter words—that was conventional, of course—and when he caught hold of her to take her away from the place, she struck him in the face with the parasol she was carrying, and he stumbled back and fell over."

"Oh, that's not murder. Much more like suicide," said Mrs. De Witt, "if he knew what sort of a woman she was, he might have known what to expect if he tried force on such a spot."

"Wait," resumed the Frenchman. "In falling, he caught hold of a point of the rock with one hand and would have saved himself, but she, seeing what had happened, stamped on his fingers with all her strength, bruising and crushing them and causing him to lose his hold. That was murder."

"But you say he didn't die?" said the baronet.

"I say it was murder in intent. What think you, Lady Walcote?" And he stopped, and looked boldly into Lola's eyes.

"I should think your friend was romancing, M. Turrian. Though I can believe that some women might be goaded to act in such a way to men by whom they had been ill-treated."

"As there was no one about to see her, I can quite believe she did it; and I've no doubt the man deserved it," said Mrs. De Witt, viciously.

"And you, Miss Leycester?"

"I am not skilled in the casuistry of murder defenses," replied Beryl, coldly.

"But if this was such a ghastly place, how did the man escape?" asked the baronet.

"His clothes were caught on a tree in some miraculous way, and after a time of suspense, in which his wits nearly left him, he was rescued."

Lola had schooled herself to reveal no sign of the painful and absorbing interest with which she listened to the story, but at this she could not avoid a quick, sudden exclamation:

"Ah!"

"This part of the story interests you, Lady Walcote?" said the Frenchman, turning and looking fixedly at her.

"No more than the rest," she replied, keeping her voice under control with an effort, the strain of which was beginning to tell upon her, and she gripped her hands tightly together on her lap as she saw the calm, clear, gray eyes of Beryl Leycester scrutinizing first herself and then the Frenchman, as if she understood that a duel was going on between them.

The scene was photographing itself on Lola's memory. The soft yellow of the lamplight; the lovely flowers on the table; those at the table turning to listen to the Frenchman's words; his attitude as he bent forward and leered, half threateningly, half jeeringly and all audaciously at her; and through the flowers and ferns Sir Jaffray, upright and handsome, listening with the rest, as unconcernedly as if it were a tale which in no wise touched the fringe of his life.

How would he look if he knew who the murderess was?

The thought flashed across Lola's brain just as she forced herself to speak in a tone of polite but casual interest. Her own voice sounded to her like that of another.

"And what did he do next?"

"Ah, that was not conventional," replied M. Turrian, turning to smile on Mrs. De Witt, but looking back almost directly to Lola, with the expression which to Beryl had seemed like a challenge and a defiance. "He went his way. He said to himself, 'This is no common act, and the vengeance shall be like it.' "

"Quite theatrical," murmured Mrs. De Witt. "But what was the end, please?"

"He let her remain, madame, under the impression that she had killed him. He hid himself, and to this hour he has never revealed the truth. He is waiting until she has taken some step which will make his reappearance her ruin, and then he will strike, choosing his own time."

"What a pity he didn't die!" exclaimed Mrs. De Witt.

"He's rather a cold-blooded brute, professor. Shouldn't care for many such friends," said the baronet.

"Does he come from Montreux?" asked Beryl, and the Frenchman, turning hastily round, met the calm, searching gaze of the girl fixed keenly on him, and in an instant recognized what a clumsy blunder he had made, and while he was muttering in some confusion a vigorous denial, Lola, who had turned pale, despite her fight for self-control, rose from the table, and at the signal the ladies left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

BERYL SPEAKS.

Almost as soon as the four ladies reached the drawing-room, old Lady Walcote pleaded a headache for an excuse to go to her rooms, and carried away Beryl with her.

"Now then, my dear, let us settle ourselves for a quiet chit-chat in the corner here," said Mrs. De Witt, as soon as she and Lola were alone, "and let's be comfortable. Tell me, who's your friend? I like him, rather, but shouldn't care to like him much."

"Do you mean M. Turrian?"

"Well, I don't mean Sir Jaffray, do I? And I say friend; I can't mean a woman, can I?"

"He's no friend of mine," replied Lola, indifferently. "He's here because Jaffray asks him."

"Well, my dear, of course he is," and she laughed significantly.

"I mean that I do not want him here," said Lola, rather warmly, resenting her companion's tone.

"Oh, it's that way, is it? He is the snarer, is he? Has it been that way with him long? How long is it since you refused him?"

Lola laughed in her turn.

"You think there must always be that kind of tie, eh?"

"Not always; but in this case, yes. Else why is he here, my dear? But he's not clever when he drinks, and if there had been twenty people at the table to-night, they could all have seen that there was some

sort of relationship between you two other than that of mere casual acquaintance or friendship."

"It's just as easy for twenty people to make a mistake as one," returned Lola, again, warmly.

"I only speak for your guidance, Lola," said her companion, not noticing the interruption, "and you can be very angry with me if you like. Never have an affair with a man who wants to blurt it out right in the teeth of the world. That man was looking at you to-night, when he was telling that cock and bull story, with an expression in his eyes which said as plainly as possible—'you and I understand one another,' and you are so inexperienced—don't be angry, my dear, you'll grow out of it in time—that you even turned a shade pale and bit your lip hard when he did look at you. Of course, I don't doubt you a bit about having no understanding with him, but in that case I wouldn't have him in the house an hour, if I were you, for he acts just as if you both did understand one another very thoroughly. And one has to be very innocent nowadays before one can afford to be suspected for nothing. It's bad enough when it's for something," and Mrs. De Witt laughed again, and shrugged her plump, white shoulders.

"You find it *h rd*, I daresay, to look through smoked glasses, and see what you take for smoke, and not cry 'fire' directly."

"That may be as you like," replied the other, curtly. "But in any case I'm not such a fool as to let a man cry 'fire, fire,' very loudly and plainly, in order that other people may amuse themselves by speculating whether there's smoke or not," and Mrs. De Witt coughed a little aggravatingly. "But tell me who is he? Where did Magog pick him up?"

Lola told her shortly.

"An old pupil; oh!" and she coughed again. "You know, Lola, you are very pretty, and—well, I have heard of such a thing as a music master falling in love—you know what I mean. Of course you know best, and it's not for me to say a word. But if I were you, I shouldn't encourage Magog in that intimacy."

Lola laughed this time, and quite unrestrainedly. Mrs. De Witt had gone so far off the track that there was no danger of her guessing anything of the truth.

"I tell you what I'll do," she said, after a moment's pause. "I'll lend him to you. Jaffray was saying the other day he'd like to see you 'setting your wicked little wits at him;' and I'll give you unconditional leave to flirt with him as much as you can."

Mrs. De Witt looked a little puzzled at this.

"No, thank you. I have a graver mission than that. I mean to bring back Magog himself to his lost allegiance," she said, audaciously. "You've monopolized him quite long enough. But I'll give your Frenchman any time I can spare from the more serious business of my visit."

"Very well," said Lola, smiling. "I'll give you all of Sir Jaffray that—you can take."

"You're very prodigal with your gifts," said Mrs. De Witt, in a rather waspish tone. She was irritated at not quite understanding Lola.

At that moment the two men were heard laughing, and directly afterward they entered the room together.

Lola, mindful of Mrs. De Witt's words, was especially guarded in her manner toward the Frenchman.

The two men sat down close to Mrs. De Witt, who held them in conversation, and Lola, sitting a little apart, grew thoughtful.

She was beginning to realize more and more clearly

how the load that she was bearing would gall and wound with its weight; and how difficult it might be to carry it at all without its crushing her.

She had noticed Beryl's tone and look when the girl had asked that question about Montreux, and she saw instantly that from that side there might develop a really serious suspicion fraught with much danger.

Lola had never understood Beryl. She could not gauge the strength and possibilities of a nature that seemed to her so indifferent, so cold, and so hard to wound. She knew that Beryl had loved Sir Jaffray; probably loved him now; and possibly might never again feel a spark of love for any other man. Such, she thought, was sometimes the persistency of these self-restrained women.

Yet there had never been a sign of hostility or resentment on Beryl's part at the breaking of that old tacit engagement and the wrecking of her life.

Why was this?

Lola had puzzled over that problem more than once; and the episode of the dinner-table showed her now that the answer to it might be the hinge on which the whole future of her life at Walcote Manor might turn.

Given that Beryl harbored any suspicion, and that by any freak of fortune she could get at the truth, how would her old love for Sir Jaffray prompt her to act?

"I should strike—at any cost," thought Lola; "but we are very different. She may have that power of self-sacrifice which I have not; and it may be that if I could control other things"—and she glanced in disgust at Pierre Turrian—"she would even do nothing. I wonder what she thinks."

"You seem very quiet, Lola," said Sir Jaffray, coming to her side at this moment. He had glanced

several times at his wife, and had noticed how unusually preoccupied and silent she was.

"Yes, I was listening for once," she answered, smiling.

"Where is Beryl? Turrian is going to sing, and I know she would like to hear him."

"She went away with the mother. I'll go and tell her;" and Lola, glad to be alone for a moment, went out of the room.

She did not go directly to Lady Walcote's rooms, but when she reached the long, broad corridor which led to them, she stayed and walked two or three times the full length of it, pursuing the train of thought which had been interrupted.

While she was thus occupied, Beryl came out of one of the rooms and stood in astonishment watching Lola, who was so absorbed that she did not hear the door open. When she reached the end of the corridor and turned, Lola for the first time noticed Beryl, and thought that the girl was watching her.

"Aren't you well, or is anything the matter, Lola?" asked Beryl.

"What should be the matter?" returned Lola, a little irritably, for Beryl's cold manner always seemed to ruffle her, and she was annoyed now at having been found doing what was unusual. "I was coming to ask you if you would not like to hear M. Turrian sing. He is going to sing now."

"It is very good of you to think of it," said Beryl. "I'll come. I should like to hear him. He interests me."

"It was not I who thought of it, but Jaffray," answered Lola. "I mustn't claim credit that belongs to him."

"Well, you came to fetch me, at any rate," replied

Beryl, with a smile that warmed her face and lighted it. Then, in a different tone, she said, as they went downstairs together, "M. Turrian is a strange character. He seems to show a new side every time I see him. I have not heard him before in the rôle of storyteller."

"Have you not?" answered Lola, indifferently. "I am rather surprised at that. He prides himself on his powers a good deal; and Jaffray thinks much of him on account of them."

But though Lola had answered lightly, she had an instinct that there was something behind the remark which menaced mischief.

As the two entered the drawing-room together, Lola glanced round her rapidly, with a curious sense that in some way a crisis was at hand, but meeting her husband's eyes, which rested upon her with an expression of warm love, she smiled him back a signal, and went and stood close to him, as though safe in the strength of his protection.

Beryl crossed to Mrs. De Witt and sat by her, looking chilled and half-restrained, taking the chair which M. Turrian offered her with exaggerated gesture and politeness.

Then the Frenchman went to the piano, where Lola and her husband stood together, and sang to Lola's accompaniment.

When he sang it was difficult to think of him as connected with anything evil. He had a marvelously rich and sweet tenor voice, which he used with consummate skill, as the vehicle of every phase of emotion.

Beryl sat listening half in a dream, leaning back in her chair and drinking in the intoxicating sweetness

of the man's voice, as it swept at will the underlying chords of her nature.

"Satan certainly had a voice like that when he sang to Eve about the apple," said Mrs. De Witt, leaning across to whisper to Beryl, and ending with a raspy, jerky laugh of shallow cynicism, which she much affected.

The words broke up a reverie in which Beryl was castle-building.

"He sings magnificently," she assented, with a slight frown at the interruption.

"Who is he, my dear, do you know?" asked Mrs. De Witt, who was very tired of listening in silence even to the singing, and was, moreover, very curious to know more about the Frenchman.

"Sir Jaffray will probably be able to tell you much more about him than I can," replied Beryl, who did not want to talk, and certainly had no intention of speaking to Mrs. De Witt on the subject.

"Quite a conspiracy of silence," was the sharply spoken reply, and a moment afterward she added, "I only wanted to know whether he'd do to have at one's house in town. What do you think, Beryl?"

"A voice like his would cover any other faults for that sort of thing. Let us listen to him, dear;" and Mrs. De Witt shrugging her shoulders impatiently at this fresh failure to find out anything about the singer, sank back in her chair and was not contented until she caught Sir Jaffray's eye and beckoned him to her side.

Meanwhile Beryl sat and listened, and picked up again the broken thread of her thoughts, watching the two at the piano, and turning now and then to glance at the handsome figure of the baronet, who sat listening to the chatter of the lively little woman at

his side, but looking at his lovely wife with his heart in his eyes.

It was a strange position; and as Beryl thought of it all it dazed and confused her; and she wondered if what she thought, or rather what she believed she knew, could possibly be true. And as often as her eyes rested on Sir Jaffray, knowing his honest, sterling honor and mindful of her old unshakable love for him she was filled with a deep pity for him on account of the blow which might fall at any moment, glooming his life.

But her face hardened and her heart steeled when she looked toward the woman who had come between her and her cousin, filling her life with the blight of lovelessness.

One step she resolved to take, and that at once. She would speak to the Frenchman. And this resolve she put in force the next day.

After breakfast, on the following morning, she waited for an opportunity of finding the Frenchman alone, and then joined him.

"M. Turrian, there is a subject on which you can help me. Can you spare me five minutes?" she said. "Will you come to the conservatory?"

"I will give you five hours, Miss Leycester," he said, with his exaggerated gesture. "What is it?" and the air of surface indifference which he assumed did not blind Beryl to the quick, questioning glance which he shot at her.

Beryl said nothing until they were in the conservatory, and it was certain that no one could hear them.

"I want to make sure that we are not overheard, M. Turrian," she said, calmly, "because what I want to ask you is very private and very important."

She took a folded paper from her pocket as she

spoke, and her fingers did not tremble in the least as she unfolded it.

"I was in Montreux this summer," she continued, "and in the course of my stay I visited the chapel of St. Sulpice, and examined the register there. I found an entry which has been a most painful puzzle to me. It is that of the marriage of a certain Pierre Turrian with Lola Crawshay. Here is a copy; can you tell me what it means?"

As she said this Beryl looked him steadily in the face and held out the paper for him to read.

He took it from her and read it, holding it with fingers which with all his efforts he could not keep from trembling violently, while his face turned to the ghastly ashen color which she had seen once before when she had told him in their first interview that Lola was married to Sir Jaffray.

She recalled that incident as she stood watching him steadily with eyes that never left his face, and waiting for the answer, which he seemed absolutely unable to force from between his lips.

And with every moment of silence the strain increased.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EVIL PLAN.

As Pierre Turrian stood, like one spell-bound, reading the slip of paper which Beryl had put into his hand, his first struggle was to fight with the sense of paralyzing astonishment which the girl's words had produced.

Then he ransacked every nook and cranny of his memory to recall what had passed between them at the time of their first interview; while, mixed up curiously with the whole mental effort was a recollection of his blunder, for which he cursed himself, in mistaking this calm, unimpassioned, quiet girl for a fool.

His first sign of a recovery from his surprise was a laugh, forced, short, unnatural, and sneering, but still an advance from his silence of blank dismay.

"How do you say you got this, Miss Leycester?" he asked, waving the paper toward her and speaking with a sneer on his lip.

"The question is not how I got it, but what it means," returned Beryl, coldly.

"On the contrary, it has everything to do with it. It is the most extraordinary coincidence I have ever heard of."

"Is that your answer?" and Beryl looked more stern than before, every feature speaking her disbelief.

"There is nothing to answer in such a thing as this. If you want an answer, all I can say is that either those who gave you this have imposed upon you in the

most monstrous fashion in the world; or for some purpose which I don't pretend to know you are trying to impose on me. That is what I mean when I want to know where you got this extraordinary document." He laughed again now, as if the charge were beneath serious notice.

"You are recovering from your first surprise, and in your effort to find time in which to invent some sort of explanation, you make it a kind of implied charge against me that I have been prying into your secrets. I understand you perfectly, and have seen through your pretenses from the first. Please to appreciate that fact in whatever you say."

He looked at her viciously as she spoke, but he was almost frightened at the cold, implacable, resolute frankness of her gray eyes. He shrugged his shoulders and lifted his white hands, and smiled till he showed his teeth, as he replied in a tone of assumed carelessness:

"You are a delightful antagonist, Miss Leycester; so fair, so true, so straight. But tell me, if you have made up your mind beforehand that I have all sorts of pretenses to be seen through and that I am the villain your looks imply, what is the use of this conversation?"

"I have said nothing about your being a villain, M. Turrian. I have asked you only what that entry in the St. Sulpice book means. That is all."

"And in what capacity do you do me the honor to catechise me? On whose behalf do you act? In what interest?"

There was no mistaking the palpable sneer in the question.

"There is no necessity to answer that question. You are not compelled to answer what I have asked

you unless you please." He was cunning enough of fence to see his advantage and to press it instantly.

"On the continent, Miss Leycester, we are not accustomed to meet with lady knight errants who take up the cause of men of the world whom they imagine to have been ill-used. It may be quite usual in England, of course; but that is my reason for asking in whose interest you undertake this energetic detective work."

His last words stung her; but she showed no irritation.

"The one question is what that paper means," she said, firmly. "There is no other question of any importance."

"Well, that is quite my view." He had quite recovered his customary impudent audacity, and was beginning to enjoy the incident. "And in that view this paper means that a young lady of excellent family, unblemished character, great mental capacity, and many personal charms"—and he bowed and paused a moment—"who is not married to Sir Jaffray Walcote, much to the regret of that distinguished baronet's more distinguished mother, has been prying into matters which do not concern her at all, except, of course, in so far as they relate to that period of her life when—it was generally understood she would make that marriage."

"You will do no good by evading the question I have asked you in the attempt—a useless one, I assure you—to irritate me by insults into a forgetfulness of it," replied Beryl, seeing that he paused to notice what effect his words would have upon her.

"It looks, I do not say it is, but it looks as if any such action were impelled by a desire to injure the woman who had taken the place of that young lady of

excellent character as the wife of Sir Jaffray. The world is a harsh censor, Miss Leycester," he said, with an indescribable air of patronage and worldly wisdom, "and reads the motives which lie on the surface—especially when somebody's character is dirtied in the process. Had you not better be careful?"

"That is nonsense," replied Beryl, curtly, "and you know it as well as I. What my motive may be is my own concern, and I am not likely to ask you or——" She checked herself, and in a flash he filled up the gap.

"Say Sir Jaffray's wife," he said, with a grin.

"Or anyone," she added, passing by the interruption, "to help me to take care of myself. If things are as that paper says, the motives of those who discover the truth are of no concern. I am not here to discuss motives, but facts. Is that true or not?" pointing to the paper.

"Certainly and emphatically it is not true, in the sense in which you seem to imply it—that I ever married a Lola Crawshay at the church of St. Sulpice in Montreux. The thing is ridiculous." And he shrugged his shoulders again with his usual gesture.

"You make my part much more difficult," said the girl; and then she turned aside a moment in thought. "Do you understand that?" she asked, after a moment of consideration.

"Miss Leycester, I understand nothing whatever of all of this," he answered.

"I have evidence which puts it beyond the shadow of a doubt that what that paper says is true; that you are the Pierre Turrian named on the face of it, and that on the date given you married the Lola Crawshay mentioned there, and that the Lola Crawshay is the same woman who is now my cousin Jaffray's wife. Is that plain enough? If you wish to know how I

found it out, I may tell you that your own conduct at the last interview we had set me thinking; that the monstrous story you told about your fiddle-strings did not for a moment deceive me; that your confusion when I told you of the marriage made it as plain as day that your interest was infinitely greater than you pretended; while your own mention of Montreux, and your subsequent obvious attempt to make me think there was nothing of importance in your connection with Montreux confirmed my opinion; and that a subsequent chain of circumstances, all save one unsought by me, forced the full discovery upon me. That every fact is known to me, please to recognize as absolutely certain."

He had listened to her statement almost breathlessly, yet showing outwardly no more than a sort of polite indifference. But he was revolving hastily in his thoughts a score of different courses of action.

There was no use in further concealment.

It was clear from the pitiless frankness of the deliberate statement that this girl was speaking the truth. And it seemed as though all the pleasant plans of an easy life were to be shattered in a moment, and he hated the woman who had done it, just as he hated everything that came in the path of his enjoyment.

He glanced at her vindictively as she was saying the last words, and he felt that he would give half his life if he could have seen that cold, hard, merciless face lying dead before him at that instant.

That thought started another and a grimmer one—so grim that involuntarily he glanced about him as if the mere harboring of it might be dangerous, while his lips felt suddenly so parched that he moistened them with his tongue.

The idea grew on him, like the germ of a noisome

plague, and instinctively his cunning prompted him to shape his course by it. What he had to find out was whether anyone else knew of this secret.

Now that his eyes had been so rudely opened to the real cleverness of the girl who had thus faced him, his wits had been quickened to read her, so as to know how best to deal with her.

For that new plan of his he must have time.

"I accept your conditions, Miss Leycester," he said, when she finished. "I admit—for now it is useless to deny—that what you have found out is true in every detail."

The suddenness of his change of manner and of the confession startled the girl more than anything that had yet passed, and she shrank back and clenched her hands tightly.

"Then what business have you here?" she cried, in a voice filled with indignation and anger.

"I will tell you all—everything," he said.

He paused a moment in indecision. He was doubtful, even at the last moment, whether, for his purposes, he would be wiser to put the blame on himself or on Lola, nor did he settle the point until he had begun to speak again.

"You have learned much of the truth," he said, "because you have learned the foundation fact of this most sad and terrible matter. Sir Jaffray Walcote and I are both married to the woman who is known as his wife; but by law and right she is my wife."

The expression on Beryl's face deepened to one of acute pain.

"It is terrible," she exclaimed, almost under her breath. She had been confident of it before, but this plain statement of it by the Frenchman shocked her.

"You do not know all."

"More than you seem to think," she interposed. "I recognized that awful story which you told last night at dinner."

He looked very keenly at her for an instant, and something which he read in her face decided him so to tell the story as to make Lola appear the unwilling victim of his own villainy.

"*Ma foi*, I told it well," he exclaimed, with a boastful laugh. "And it was a devilish bit of revenge, and on my soul I was sorry for the poor girl. You know, Miss Leycester, I am not cast in the mold of common men. I can be as stanch and true and good as the rarest of men; but I can also be just as rough and hard—aye, and as merciless. Man that is born of a woman is born sometimes with all a woman's qualities. My mother was a tigress. Let me smoke. It is long since I was in the confessional box, and I need tobacco to make the words come glibly."

He spoke with easy, fluent impudence, infinitely disgusting to Beryl, but chosen by him designedly to throw back the girl's pity on Lola, painting himself intentionally in the blackest colors.

"I married Lola Crawshay," he resumed, after lighting a fresh cigarette, "from no silly, sentimental notions, but because I had a hold over her on account of a trip of her long-headed, but somewhat irresponsible old father. To do the girl justice, she never did anything but hate me. But she was exceedingly useful and—well, she was afraid to carry her hatred of me too far, because I had a knack of using with excellent effect my knowledge of her father's mistake. You understand?"

He leered at her with repulsive assurance as he paused to take a couple of whiffs of the cigarette, which he did with great apparent enjoyment.

"You will make this as short as possible," said Beryl, beginning to take the impression of the case which he intended.

"Certainly. Well, I will pass over our matrimonial life, and hurry on to the end. There came the day when we had the scene on the Devil's Rock. I colored the incident a little in my telling it last night, and the little episode of the stamping on my fingers was an effort of my own invention." He did not wish Beryl to think that Lola had done anything of the kind. "In the plain and uncolored version, I had nothing but my own clumsy stupidity to blame for the whole affair. I had said things which did not please her ladyship—a man cannot always guard his tongue, you know, Miss Leycester—even to his wife—and when she retorted I tried force, and then when she resented it I started back, and like a fool fell over the edge of the cliff. How I was saved from instant death I cannot even guess; but I didn't die, as you can see for yourself; and when I found myself alive I had wit enough to hide the fact of my escape, seeing that in the course of time I could probably make excellent use of it should she ever again marry. I wasn't altogether a bad judge, as you will now admit, was I?"

"Have you anything else to tell me?" asked Beryl, with angry contempt.

"Anything else?" and he laughed lightly, and rolled the cigarette between his fingers and looked at it, as he repeated the words with the air of one who repeats a good joke. "Anything else? I should think so. Why, I could fill up any number of your spare hours with the tale of any number of good things. But let me stick to this one while I am about it. I didn't get off scot free of course. I sprained and bruised and strained and crushed myself in a goodly number of

places, and as soon as I could do so without that devoted wife of mine knowing anything about it, I laid up and passed a month or two dismally in bed, maturing my plans. But when I got about again, my lady had flown, and what was worse, her father was as dead as the tombstone they put over him in Neuchatel Cemetery. Well, I let her go. I let her feel her freedom. I am kind and gentle as the morning when no one gets in my way. I let her go. I knew I could find her; and being always an honest and industrious soul, I set to work whereby to live. But in a year I began to pine, to droop, to fail; and I set out on my travels in search of her who had deserted me. In the course of time I tracked her to England, and—well, you know the rest."

He stopped and waved his hand as though he had finished.

"Go on—to the end," said Beryl.

"The end; *ma foi*, the end is not yet. You gave me the news that my wife had done what I hoped she would, and you helped me to find her. I thank you. I found her, saw her, showed her what my power was, and how she must do what I wished or be dragged in the dirt of scandal and calumny. Poor Lola, I am sorry for her. She thought my bones were bleaching at the foot of the Devil's Rock, when they walked into her presence, covered with flesh and clothed in sprightly attire. Poor devil. But a man must live;" and he laughed as if the thought tickled him.

Beryl looked at him with the deepest loathing, and could scarce restrain the words of scorn that rose to her lips. He read her looks.

"I see what you would say," he exclaimed, with his usual movement of the shoulders, as if to deprecate

her opinion. "For the moment it is an ugly-looking part that I play; but Lola can well spare the little allowance which I require for my few wants. She made the mistake, not I; and man can't live without money. I am no Enoch Arden, and so long as no one knew, there was no risk. But now you have probably told half a dozen people, and the thing must end—and that's all about it. I'm not sure that I'm sorry."

"I have told no one as yet," said Beryl, and could she have seen the light that leaped into his eyes at the statement, she would have been on her guard, but her head was turned from him for the moment.

"I don't mean told people outright. But you silly women do a hundred things which leave the trail of your movements such that a blind fool can see what you've been doing. It's the same thing."

"No one has even a suspicion of this horrible secret except myself," said the girl. "There's but one paper which under any conceivable circumstances could suggest a clew to anyone. I have been most scrupulous, because I have had to think of the honor of the family. I have a plan——"

But at that moment the door of the conservatory was opened with a needless amount of noise, and some one came in coughing loudly and shuffling the feet on the tiled floor.

The two turned and found Mrs. De Witt coming toward them.

"I hope I don't intrude, but upon my word I couldn't restrain myself any longer. I'm only a woman, you know, and when I'd seen you two here in such serious consultation for over an hour—positively, Beryl, over an hour, and nearly two—and as I was dying to know what it was all about I couldn't resist the temptation to make a noise and come in. M. Tur-

rian, you interest me so much I can't bear to see you monopolized in this way, and by Beryl, too, of all people." And she looked from one to the other with curiosity in every eyelash.

"Madame, if the interest that you feel were only such as I could dare to hope, I should feel that I had lived indeed," and he bowed with his exaggerated courtesy, while a mocking smile drew down the corners of his mouth.

"You Frenchmen are all equally insincere," she said. "But what on earth have you two been talking about; you two of all others?"

"You may not know, madame," replied Turrian, gravely, "that Miss Leycester was the first person in England to whom I spoke on the great object of my presence here in England; that she then was able to throw most valuable light upon it, and now I have been explaining to her at great length all that is meant by the fifth string on a violin, and all the part I have cast for myself. Is not that so, Miss Leycester?" He turned to her with unabashed impudence, and smiled as he waited for her answer.

Beryl passed over the question and spoke to Mrs. De Witt.

"We had nearly finished; you did not interrupt. I want to think over what M. Turrian has said," and she left them.

"She takes the interruption badly," said Mrs. De Witt, when the two were alone. "I think she is a good deal changed—since this marriage," she added, a little maliciously.

"I have heard about that," said M. Turrian, significantly. "She is a very curious girl. I should think very close and secretive. Umph?"

"She is as good as sterling gold," said Mrs. De Witt,

in a burst of enthusiasm; but, hedging her verdict instantly, "and, like all good people, sometimes very objectionable. As for closeness, she might be an iron safe."

"I thought so," murmured the Frenchman; and as he turned the conversation with a light compliment, the thought was running in his head that Beryl alone knew the secret, and that if by mischance she were to die, it would die with her.

CHAPTER XII.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

Beryl went away from her interview with the Frenchman sorely perplexed as to what was best for her to do.

She did not doubt a word of what he had said against himself, and his callous confession of his villainous conduct had made her shudder with hate of him. She had never come into personal contact with anyone who had a tithe of his rascality, and the experience was so strange and baffling that it confused and dazed her.

But the interview had changed her attitude toward Lola. It was clear to her now that whatever might be Lola's faults, she was more to be pitied than blamed in this matter; and Beryl thought with a shudder of loathing and disgust of the fate of any woman tied to such a scoundrel as Pierre Turrian, and in his merciless power.

What was to be done?

Beryl asked herself the question over and over again, as she paced up and down her room, and there seemed no answer to it save one that spelled sorrow and misery, and, perhaps, disgrace for them all. She hated to think that she had to bring all this trouble on those who were so dear to her; and she dreaded all the exposure and scandal that must follow.

When she had told the man that she had thought of a means of escape from all the trouble, it had been merely that in her almost morbid eagerness to prevent

scandal, she meant that he must consent to go away at once, and leave the future settlement of the difficulty with Lola to be effected quietly in his absence.

Her repugnance at his conduct made her even anxious to let the blow fall as lightly as possible on Lola, who by this time no doubt bitterly repented what she had done; and Beryl's pity for her grew every moment as she dwelt on the man's cruel baseness in trading on her act. Her own high sense of honor and her deep religious feeling accentuated in her thoughts the sense of bitter despair which she imagined must overwhelm Lola at being forced to admit her crime, and to lose the man she loved so deeply or to go on living in what was in truth a state of shame and sin.

Gradually a single resolve cleared itself in her thoughts.

She would make the man go away at once—that very day, indeed, under pain of Sir Jaffray being told of everything, and then she would determine how to act in regard to Lola.

With this resolve she left her room to seek M. Turrian and tell him what she had decided. As she was going down stairs the luncheon gong sounded, and thus she had to pass through the ordeal of seeing the man whom she knew on his own confession to be a treacherous scoundrel, eating and drinking, laughing and talking with the chivalrous friend whom he was betraying every moment that he stayed in the house.

The mere sight of him sickened her; and when he turned and spoke to her, and with his consummate audacity rallied her upon her looks and hoped that all he had said about his scheme had not troubled her, she could scarcely remain at the table.

He perceived this, and with his daring effrontery

dropped little hints and innuendos, as if challenging her to speak.

As soon as the lunch was over, however, she followed him and said she must speak to him alone.

He turned willingly, and instantly with his false, mocking, ever-ready smile on his face.

"Shall we go to the conservatory again?" he asked. "It is an excellent place for these touching little confidences. I declare I am almost glad of them; they let me see so much of you."

"Anywhere will do for the few words I have to say," returned Beryl, angrily. "It is this. Unless you leave Walcote Manor within an hour, Sir Jaffray will know all."

"Yes?" he answered, raising his eyebrows. "Well, I am sorry for my poor friend, then. It will be a blow to him and he will feel it. For I shall not go, Miss Leycester. I can't make any plausible excuse. But this I will do, if you like. I will go to-morrow morning."

"I will give you till twelve o'clock to-morrow," said the girl, "and not one hour longer."

"It shall be as you will," he exclaimed, and when Beryl turned on her heel and left him without another word, he looked after her and muttered between his teeth, "Twelve o'clock to-morrow! Between now and then there is a night, young lady, and for you a long one, or I am a fool and a coward."

Then he sauntered on to the conservatory by himself, and smoked thoughtfully for some minutes. Afterward he went out and walked round the house, looking at the position and height from the ground of the bedroom windows in the wing where he knew Beryl's room was, and he was pleased with what he saw.

"It will do," he muttered. "And now there must be a word or two with Sir Jaffray's wife. She must take her part in this scene, and she will want very careful handling. Let me think it out a bit."

He turned into a side-path in the grounds, and walked for some time, plunged in close, concentrated thought.

When he returned to the house he had his plan completed, and he went to find Lola. In the hall he met Mrs. De Witt, who assumed an air of disconsolate trouble.

"Where is everybody?" she asked. "I am all alone. Won't you take pity on me, M. Turrian?"

"Where is Sir Jaffray?" he asked, wishing the woman at the bottom of the sea.

"Sir Jaffray and Lola have gone out riding. Sir Jaffray had a sudden summons to a meeting of county folks about some political business or other, and Lola has ridden off with him. They're like a couple of ridiculous lovers in their first calf love, those two. Isn't it absurd? They must always be together."

"Time will change all that," said the Frenchman. "It is not the sort of folly of which you would be guilty, madame?"

"Do you mean that nastily?"

"No, indeed. But you know so well how to keep at a cool distance from your admirers—even from your husband," and he bowed. He felt vicious at Lola's absence, and Mrs. De Witt's pertness irritated him.

"Men are like mites under the microscope, requiring to be kept at a focus distance."

"Possibly, but be careful. The microscope may serve as the burning glass of passion and warm them into life," he answered, insolently, looking at her with an expression in his eyes which made her flush.

"Come," he said, passing his arm through hers and leading her away to the music hall, "let me sing to you."

"Anything to kill the time till to-night," was his thought.

"What shall I sing to you?" he asked, putting her close to him by the piano, so close that he could stop and touch her hand when he pleased. He ran his fingers over the keys with the touch of a master, and broke into a long Italian love song, running through all the phases of emotional love, and singing the softest, sweetest words in his wonderful voice that rose and fell in the cadences of the air, now wild, now rollicking, now joyous, and again soft, like the plaint of a dove, and ending with a strain that made even Mrs. De Witt self-forgetful and emotional, and all but brought the tears to her eyes.

"You see what you can do with me," he said, in a gentle, caressing tone, laying a hand on hers, which she did not shake off, while he looked right into her eyes.

She made a movement then as if to take her hand from his, and quickly he turned to the piano.

"You are cruel," he said, without looking at her, and then he burst again into a song in which his whole heart and soul seemed to be caught in a strong, irresistible swirl of emotion. He was like one beside himself; till the end came, suddenly and quickly; and then as if obeying an irresistible impulse, he turned to her swiftly, and catching her in his quick, lithe embrace, he held her close to him while he kissed her three times passionately right full on the lips.

She half screamed, and struggled back, frightened at what she deemed his sudden passion for her, and

yet not wholly displeased at having fired the man. Then she found her voice and cried:

"How dare you?" and in a tumult of mingled emotion fled out of the room.

When the door closed behind her he laughed and shook his head, and cried to himself in a tone of glee:

"Serve you right, my lady, for trying to play with fire," and turning to the piano he rattled out a gay French chanson in a tone of sheer devil-may-care humor.

At the end of it he jumped up impetuously from the piano, and with a frown on his face, swore volubly in French as he crossed the room to one of the windows which opened on to the terrace in front of the house.

"What a day. How I hate this infernal suspense. I wish the night would come and get the thing over."

But he forced back his light, laughing, devil-may-care manner for the rest of the day and evening. Lola and her husband did not come back until close to the dinner time, and thus he saw nothing of her.

Mrs. De Witt he met with an indescribable air of repentance, mingled with pleasure, that he had been led on to such a pitch of audacity; and she was fooled by his manner till she forgave him.

"If you do not forgive me, I shall leave the manor to-morrow morning," he said. "And yet why should I ask forgiveness? Was it not the fault of your own beauty? Who would blame me for losing myself in the maze of your eyes?"

"I will not forgive you if you do not give me your solemn word of honor never to recall your offense; and never to dream of offending again."

"I am not an icicle," he murmured. "Is love an offense? Stay, I am sorry, I pain you," he cried, with a sudden impulse. "On my honor I will never again

forget what I wish I need never remember;" and he spoke with such apparent earnestness and feeling that Mrs. De Witt forgave him without another word.

With Beryl he was audacity itself. He paid her marked attention in a perfectly deferential manner, but in a way which those present could not fail to notice.

"There is a truce till to-morrow at twelve o'clock," he said to her as soon as they met. "I hold you to your word. Till then things are as they have been here, and you play your part with the rest."

"I have no part to play," she answered, coldly.

"Pardon me. You are anxious for the honor of the family." The sneer in his tone was quite perceptible to her. "And if you do not keep your word and maintain the terms of the truce, I will not keep mine, and you can force an open *esclandre*. As you will."

And Beryl, forced in this way, was compelled to submit to the little attentions which of deliberate purpose he paid her.

It was part of his plan that all at the manor should, for that night, see that the two were on excellent terms; and in that he was so completely successful that Sir Jaffray mentioned it both to him and to Lola.

The Frenchman's almost reckless gayety lasted all through the evening; and Lola could not fail to notice it. It disturbed her. She knew the man, and knew well enough that it was the cloak for a state of nervous restlessness, the result of great agitation of some kind. She watched him closely, endeavoring to get some clew that would give her the key to the problem of his intentions and feelings. But she could detect nothing.

Beryl was struck by it also, and surprised by it; and was angered at the false position in which the man by his audacity placed her. But she set it down merely

to his desire to brazen out his villainy before her, and to show that though he was afraid not to accept the terms she had imposed, yet he was resolved to accept them in his own way. Some of the effects, too, she put down to wine. She observed that he drank heavily at dinner; and this increased the disgust she felt toward him.

But not a glimpse of the terrible truth dawned upon her; not a thought that ever in the midst of his wildest sallies, his loudest laughs, his tenderest songs, his thoughts were all set in deadly concentration upon his plan to take her life that night.

She retired early, going to sit with old Lady Walcote in her rooms, and there was not a thought of personal danger in her mind. She was relieved to think that the man had spent his last evening at the manor, and that from then the atmosphere of the place would be the clearer for his absence; and she was glad to reflect also that one part of the complicated problem would by the morrow be in a fair way of settlement.

When the man himself was gone, it would be much easier to deal with the question as it affected Lola; and this was the thought which she had when, after some two or three hours, she went to her own room, which was next to that of Lady Walcote's, to go to bed.

Fortunately for her, she could not sleep. The interview with Pierre Turrian had opened up a vein of human nature which was so novel to her—naked, unblushing, unashamed villainy—and she had been so profoundly moved by all that she had heard, and by the mystery and misery which hung over the house, that she lay awake hour after hour, tossing from side to side, trying to see some way out of the tangle.

For a long time she burned a light, reading now and

again in the attempt to break the thread of her painful thoughts; but finding this vain, she put out the light and lay in the darkness.

The night was not, however, a very dark one. There was a moon, though its light was shrouded by the heavy drift of clouds, which a somewhat fitful wind was driving across the sky. Her blind was drawn up, according to her custom, to catch the earliest morning light, and now and again, when her eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness, she could watch the flying clouds, as she lay with her face turned toward the window.

It was while she was thus occupied once, having made another vain effort to get to sleep, that she fancied she could hear a noise, though whether it was in her room, or out in the corridor, or in the next room, or outside, she could not say. Thinking that it might be Lady Walcote moving, she listened very intently.

What she heard next made her heart beat quickly. She was a brave girl, full of resource and daring at need; but the noise she heard might have made a man nervous.

It came from outside in the night, and it seemed that thieves were breaking in the Manor House. What she heard was the sound of a ladder being placed close to her window. She heard the end as it struck the wall, and again it was moved into a different position.

She could think rapidly on occasion, and act as well. Now, she jumped out of bed, slipped on some clothes, and a dark dressing gown, and turned to alarm the house.

But with her hand on the door she paused, and, moving swiftly back across the room to the window,

she looked out cautiously, keeping herself well out of view.

Just as she reached the window the head of a man, who was creeping stealthily up the ladder, reached the level of the lowest pane of glass, and putting his face to the glass, and shading it with his hand, he peered into the room.

Beryl saw the man and shrank back, shuddering and cold, as she recognized the handsome, cruel face of Pierre Turrian.

Then in an instant the meaning of it all flashed upon her.

He had begged for the delay in order that he might destroy the evidence of his villainy and murder her, the only witness who knew of it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ATTEMPT ON BERYL'S LIFE.

The instant that Beryl saw who it was that was threatening to break into her room and guessed the reason of the visit, she shrank back as closely as possible to the wall, and waited in breathless suspense while Pierre Turrian completed his scrutiny of the room.

By stooping her head forward very slightly she was able to watch him, and saw that he was bending sideways from the ladder, while seemingly holding on to it with one hand.

So long as he continued to stare into the room, she did not move a muscle, and almost held her breath, lest he should hear her, and being disturbed make off.

For her rapid, shrewd brain had resolved that she would if possible let him carry out his intention of getting into the room, in order that he might the more clearly reveal his object, while she took ample means to provide for her own safety.

Her nimble wits devised an easy method of tricking him, if only he would give her an opportunity of a couple of minutes' preparation, and this to her intense relief he did.

Finding that he had not placed the ladder sufficiently close to the window to be able to open it, the man descended it slowly and softly, just as he had climbed it, and Beryl, straining every nerve to listen, heard him go down.

With swift deft movement she so made up the bed

that it looked as though some one were sleeping in it, and then she opened the door, which was covered by a curtain, and, muffling her head in a dark shawl, she stood in the doorway sufficiently concealed by the door curtain, and waited.

She had not long to wait.

Almost as soon as she had finished her preparations she heard the top of the ladder bumping softly against the wall as Pierre Turrian came up it again.

As he reached the top, and his head showed between the window and the sky, the moon shone out and lighted up the window and the figure of the man, and came flooding into the room almost to the feet of the girl.

She saw him peer eagerly into the room, while it was thus illuminated, and she could fancy his eyes gleaming with satisfaction at finding all quiet within and seeing what looked like the form of the sleeper still and motionless on the bed.

In another second the moonlight had gone, and all was dark again, and before Beryl's eyes had recovered sufficiently from the change from moonlight to dark to let her see what he was doing, she heard the click of the window bolt as it flew back before the thin knife blade which Pierre Turrian had passed between the sashes.

The next instant the lower sash was raised cautiously, slowly, and almost noiselessly, save that the draught caused by the rush of air from the window to the open door set the curtain rustling; while Beryl felt the night air strike cold and chill upon that part of her face which was uncovered so that she might see what was being done.

As soon as the window was raised high enough, the man stepped in so softly and quietly that Beryl could

scarcely hear him, and then he closed the window behind him.

At that instant a thought occurred to the girl. What if the Frenchman were not coming in search of her, but were merely paying a surreptitious visit to this wing of the house, and had chosen by chance her room to pass through? In that case she stood right in his path.

But his actions almost immediately removed the doubt.

The moon had not shone out again from behind the clouds, and the room was too dark for Pierre Turrian to see with any clearness. But Beryl's eyes had grown so accustomed to the gloom that as he stood between her and the window she could watch every action of his.

He stood quite still for almost half a minute, looking toward the bed as it seemed; and the stillness was so acute that Beryl could even hear him breathe.

After a pause he took something from his pocket which she thought was a handkerchief, and shook it out lightly, and folding it carelessly, held it in his left hand. Then he stood still with his head bent forward toward the bed, as though listening intently for the breathing of the sleeper he thought was lying there at his mercy.

Beryl clenched her teeth as she noticed this.

Next, and with only a slight pause, he took something from another pocket; what it was she could not see; but when she saw him put it to his mouth and heard a slight creaking sound, as of a cork being drawn, she knew that it was a bottle, and she was prepared to see him pour the contents on to the handkerchief. This done, he thrust the bottle hastily into a

side pocket and moved slowly and very stealthily toward the head of the bed.

A faint smell of drugs spread itself over the room, and Beryl recognized it instantly as chloroform.

It was now quite clear to her what he meant to do.

He was going to drug her first and probably suffocate her, and then search for the paper which she had told him that morning was the only incriminating piece of evidence in her possession.

He meant to murder her.

This thought, which might well have unnerved her, had a quite opposite effect. It stimulated her courage, and from the security of her hiding place, and with the assurance that she had only to step out in the corridor and call loudly for help to be quite safe, she watched his every movement with infinite interest.

He had passed now out of the line of the window, and his movements in the deeper gloom were more difficult to follow; but she could still make out what he did.

Before he reached the head of the bed it was obvious that he was puzzled by something unusual. Probably, she thought, by hearing no sound of breathing from the bed. He bent forward and listened again intently, and as he was in the act of doing this the clouds parted again from before the moon's face and the silver light came once more streaming brilliantly into the room.

Before it vanished Beryl heard him mutter an oath in French into his mustache, while he stood irresolute what to do.

Then he moved forward again to the head of the bed and stooped low down, keeping the chloroformed handkerchief in evident readiness to hold over the face of the sleeper.

There was now no possibility of mistake as to his intentions, and Beryl chose that moment to intervene.

In a low but perfectly clear voice she said:

"It is useless, M. Turrian, you will have to choose some other time and means to murder me."

The man started from the bed as though the outlined figure had suddenly taken life and struck him. He could not tell from where the sound of the voice came, and he stood irresolute and apprehensive, and muttered a half-suppressed oath.

"I have been watching you since the moment your face first appeared outside the window. I have waited only to see what you intend to do. I can see that plainly now. I know the smell of chloroform"—he pushed the handkerchief hurriedly into his pocket as she said this—"and now if you do not go instantly I will rouse the whole household, and proclaim you a murderer before every soul in the manor."

He glared across the spot where Beryl now showed herself, having thrown the door partly open.

"You are the devil," he growled between his clenched teeth, while he seemed as though he would venture to attack her where she stood. But she did not flinch, and the impulse passed.

He muttered a whole volley of oaths in French under his breath, and recognizing the uselessness of attempting to do anything, he opened the window again and got out on to the ladder, just as the moon shone out for the third time, lighting up with its gleams the evil, vindictive, handsome face.

She fastened the window after he had gone out, and stood and watched him as he slunk away, keeping in the shadow of the house. Then she lit a lamp, and, wrapping herself in warm clothes, read a book until the morning broke. Then she got into bed to snatch

a couple of hours' sleep, knowing that the servants would be moving about the manor and that she need fear no further attack.

Early in the morning she was wakened by a servant who explained that a messenger had come from Leicester Court to say that her father was ill and wished her to return home instantly.

Before this summons all other considerations vanished, and explaining hastily the circumstances to old Lady Walcote and leaving a letter for Lola, the girl hurried home, leaving the complication in which she had become entangled exactly where it had stood on the previous day.

Thus when Pierre Turrian inquired, at breakfast, with some perturbation, where Miss Leicester was, he heard to his great relief that she had gone home.

This meant a respite for him.

He had come down determined to brazen it all out; dare Beryl to do her worst; to deny absolutely any story which she might tell as to the attempt on her life, and to risk everything on the chance of getting a few more days at the Manor House in order to complete a plan which had been shaping itself in his thoughts as a sort of last desperate act.

In that he needed the help of Lola, and resolved to have a long talk with her and compel her to fall in with his views.

But he let nothing of his darker thoughts appear in his manner, and he was as jaunty in air, light of tongue, and pleasantly chatty as usual, during the whole of breakfast.

In whatever direction the conversation turned he took such share as was usual with him, whether he knew anything about a subject or not, and except that he looked a little haggard from a sleepless night, there

was nothing in his manner to suggest to any of the others that anything unusual had happened or was being planned by him.

He was annoyed when he heard Sir Jaffray say that he and Lola were riding out together, because he wanted to have his interview with her as soon as possible, and had intended to speak to her that morning; but he accepted the temporary check with equanimity, as inevitable.

Before she started, however, he managed to get two minutes alone with her when she stood with her habit on, waiting for Sir Jaffray.

"I must see you to-day alone for an hour," he said.

"Thank you; I have nothing whatever to say to you in private," she answered, curtly.

"Something has happened of which you know nothing. I want to tell you. It affects the whole position here, and everything is in peril. You must be warned, for your own safety. I'm not a fool to cry 'wolf' without a very real cause. You know that. There is serious danger."

Lola bit her lip, and was startled despite her efforts.

"I shall probably be back some time before Sir Jaffray, and will see you before lunch."

"I wish you both a pleasant ride," he said, aloud, and with a smile, for Sir Jaffray had come up. "I shall try and do an hour or two's work at music." And he stood smiling, and bareheaded, looking after them as they rode away down the drive. Then he turned back into the house, and went to the music-room, where he found Mrs. De Witt evidently waiting for him. But he was in no mood for flirting or fooling with her.

"Are you going to play or sing, M. Turrian?" she asked. "The lovers have ridden off together and left

us. Lola was full of excuses for leaving me; but I told her I would certainly excuse her, seeing that as the other people are coming soon, this may be the last chance they would have of billing and cooing together. And they are so absurdly happy with one another, that I could not think of letting etiquette interfere. Besides, Lola is such an unconventional creature one can't expect her to do as other people."

"No, true; otherwise you'd be riding with the husband, and I should be talking to the wife. As it is, they positively leave us together. It is very droll, when you think of it. If anything were to happen; if I were to fall violently in love with you, or you with me, their responsibility would be enormous."

Mrs. De Witt laughed, not very pleasantly.

"You are a singular man," she said.

"Because I loved you yesterday afternoon, and don't love you this morning? Say, rather, a natural man. Passion, madame, is a garment to be worn only on occasion, lest it should grow shabby, and tattered with too much use."

"You are insulting."

"Not in the least," he answered, insolently. "Women in the morning are appendages; in the afternoon, playmates, and in the evening, playthings. But they are never necessities, except in the sense of being necessary evils, and that only after marriage."

"I have no desire to be an appendage to an idle singer," said Mrs. De Witt, very angrily, and she swept out of the room, disappointed at the difference between his present mood and that of the previous day.

Pierre Turrian was glad to get rid of her so easily, and he went out soon afterward, and, choosing a part of the drive which would enable him to catch the ear-

liest glimpse of Lola on her return, he walked up and down, thinking and smoking cigarettes incessantly until she came.

As soon as he caught sight of her coming, he hurried back to the house, and waited for her to dismount, and the moment she entered the great hall of the manor, he spoke to her.

"Where can we go? We must be very private."

"Come into the library," she answered, leading the way into the room where they had had their first interview at the manor.

"If anyone wants me, I am engaged," she said to the servant. Then, when the latter had closed the door, she turned to the Frenchman, "Now, what is it?"

He looked at her for a moment without replying, and then said with emphatic deliberation:

"The worst that it could be. Everything is known."

And for the moment Lola lost all her self-possession in the cold cramp that seemed to seize and paralyze her heart at the man's words and manner.

CHAPTER XV.

"IF SIR JAFFRAY WERE TO DIE SUDDENLY."

For more than a minute Lola was unable to frame a word in reply to what Pierre Turrian had said. The almost brutal frankness with which he had delivered the thrust had overwhelmed her and the host of nervous fears which had plagued her during the time of his presence in the house now recurred with cruel and distressing force.

It was Pierre Turrian who broke the silence with a jeer.

"You seem a good deal upset by a simple thing which you ought certainly to have expected. Where are your wits? You couldn't think this kind of thing was to go on forever."

This speech started the hope that the man was really deceiving her and playing for his own purposes.

"What do you mean by the secret being known? What secret?" she asked.

"You're not going to hark back to the rubbishy nonsense that we played at when we met here first, I hope," and he laughed sneeringly. "I don't care what you do though. You can start any fool's tale you like for that matter. But what I mean is this, that there is now a third person who knows that you and I were married in the Church of St. Sulpice at Montreux, and that person means to tell everybody else."

"Who is it?" There was no hope in the tone in which the question was asked.

"Someone who doesn't bear you much love; Beryl Leicester. And a very unpleasant antagonist she is, I can assure you."

"How do you know that she knows?"

"For the best of all possible reasons. She told me so. She put into my hands a copy of the register from St. Sulpice and asked me what it meant."

"And what did you say?" came the question, eagerly interposed.

"What should I say? That it was a lie, and that she was the victim of an extraordinary delusion. But she very soon showed me that I was the liar; and when I found that she did know, I gave the business up and told my version."

"It's you who let out the truth with your tale of the Devil's Rock," cried Lola, vehemently.

"Nonsense. She had the facts and it was only a matter of when she should speak. She spoke to me yesterday, and I told her my version of the matter. My faith, but I painted myself as black as a raven and you as white as a dove." He laughed heartily as he said this. "Imagine, you white as a dove; the innocent and all unsuspecting Marguerite persecuted by an atrocious villain of a Mephistopheles, myself. I compelled you to marry me. I made your life a hell; I drove you to rebel; I ill-treated you, and fell over that rock—with never a stamp of the foot to help me. I hid myself waiting for vengeance. I tracked you down when you had married. I drove you to this life of lies; all I, I, I, for the villainy; and you for the sweet pure victim. On my soul when I think of it I laugh down to my boots."

He lighted a cigarette and puffed at it in silence for a minute, and when he spoke again there was a sharp

change in his tone and manner which made Lola look up.

"But I had a purpose, mark you, and if the devil hadn't failed me for once, I would have carried it out, and have silenced that sly she-cat once for all. I sought to get delay by making you out as the victim, and I meant to stop that fool's chatter for good and all."

"What do you mean?"

"That that cold-faced cat was within an ace of death last night. That I went to her room in the dead of the night to save you from her devilment; and had it not been for some cursed chance that kept her awake, and let her hear me coming, you would have woke up this morning to find that your old rival was laid out cold and stark, freed from the fretting troubles of this wicked world by the blessing of chloroform and my strong arm, and unable to go chattering about other people's business."

"Do you mean you tried to murder Beryl Leycester last night in her bed in this house?" cried Lola, paling with excited agitation.

He paused before he answered, and looked at her aslant, with his eyelids half closed.

"Is murder so much uglier in a bedroom than on a mountain side that you shudder at the sound in the one case, and yet can do the deed in the other? Bah!" He sneered and waved his hand impatiently. "Don't be a fool, Lola. Tell me the truth, and say you're as sorry as I am that I failed. Don't cant."

"As God is my judge," she cried, passionately, "I would rather ten thousand times that you had killed me," and then, overwrought, she sank on a chair that was by her, and leaning her arms on the table buried her face in them, in an agony of tearless misery.

His words had revealed to her with lightning vividness the full horror and hopelessness of her position.

The price of her sin had nearly been murder, and the thought overwhelmed her. Yet she was helpless.

Why was her fate linked with that of this man of infamy who held in his relentless hands the power to crush her life and dog her to ruin?

Where could it all end, save in greater misery for them all? And then she reproached herself bitterly for having sought to escape from the meshes of the net which fate had woven round her feet.

For some time she could not regain her self-command; but recognizing at last how worse than useless with a man like Pierre Turrian was any attitude but that of firmness, she made a great effort to show a bold front to him.

"Better?" he sneered, as soon as she raised her head. "It was rather a hard hit, I dare say. But you mustn't lose your nerve just now. There's work to be done."

"You are right," she answered, steadily, "there is work. But it must not and shall not be murder."

"You'd be much wiser if you didn't use such ugly terms. You seem to forget that half the actions of the whole world depend for their respectability upon their description. Now, if you've enough pluck left to listen quietly, I'll soon show you which way your interest lies."

"You can say what you like. It is immaterial."

He glanced at her angrily, and muttered an oath at her for the tone in which she spoke.

"There is no time now for losing our tempers in, or else you'd make me do so with that infernal sneering manner!" he cried, angrily. "This is how things stand. You married me at Montreux at the Chapel of St. Sulpice, and you are now in law, if not in love, my

wife. Being still my wife you married the master of this fine place, and in doing that committed what your law calls bigamy. You did, as you will say, in ignorance, hoping that you had seen the last of me when the stamp of that pretty but energetic foot of yours sent me rolling down into the gorge from the Devil's Rock; but unfortunately for your plea of ignorance, when I came here, you went on pretending that you were Sir Jaffray's wife, and continued to stop here though you knew the marriage was bigamous and void. Do you see what that does? It just pricks the bubble of your innocence, and it puts you a deal deeper into the mud than you were before. That's all; and if it's any consolation to you you may know that I saw that from the first, and it suited my purpose that you should be compromised as much as possible."

He stopped and looked at her in triumph, and as if expecting an outburst. But she had mastered her emotion by this time completely.

"Go on," she said, quietly.

"That means that you can at any moment be put on your trial for bigamy, and have to face the whole world from the prisoner's dock. And what is more, that I can put you there, and will, if you drive me to it. Get that into your head clearly."

"I am waiting to know what you want. I have never doubted either your bullying cowardice or your cunning."

"What I want is easily said. I want to clear away from your path the difficulties that threaten to ruin you."

"You are suddenly very solicitous on my account," she retorted.

"And I mean to show you the only way in which it

can be done," he continued, not heeding the interruption. "Sir Jaffray has settled on you a good many thousands of pounds, and, as I happen to know, he has in his will, like a loving husband should, left you everything that he could leave without touching the entailed estates. Now"—he paused and looked very closely at her, and spoke very deliberately—"if Sir Jaffray were to die, say by any accident, or suddenly in any way, you would as suddenly be freed from all your embarrassments."

She met his look and returned it with one which seemed to hold his eyes fixed on her.

"Well?" She uttered the single syllable question without allowing a sign or symptom of her feeling to be seen in her face.

"I mean," and his voice grew a trifle hoarse and unsteady, "I mean that Sir Jaffray is the one obstacle in your path, and it is necessary for your sake and for mine, that the obstacle should be removed."

Lola clenched her hands till the nails nearly ran into her palms, and she bit her lip hard in her agitation, and it was fully a minute before she trusted herself to speak.

The Frenchman filled up the interval by lighting a fresh cigarette and walking up and down the room. He was glad of the pause, for the strain of the moment told on him. He was very pale and the perspiration came out in a line of beads on his forehead.

"I think I understand you," said Lola, at length, when she could trust herself to speak. "And what is to happen after—after what you mean?"

He was by the door of the room when she spoke, and he turned and answered, standing still. He tried to speak lightly.

"What should happen," he cried, with a wave of the

hands and a shrug of the shoulders. "You would be free, and I would claim you as my wife."

"You would claim me!" she repeated.

"Certainly," he said, masterfully. "You would be my wife—"

He stopped suddenly without finishing the sentence, and turned toward the door.

"What's that?" he cried. He rushed to the door and tried to open it quickly, but in his haste, fumbled with the handle, and then threw it open and looked out.

There was no one there, though he thought he could hear the whisk of a dress. But he said nothing of this to Lola.

"I was mistaken," he said, returning to the room and closing the door behind him.

"It must be a devil's plot, indeed," said Lola, "when it makes even you imagine that there are eavesdroppers."

He made no answer to this.

"Well, you know my plan now," he said. "It is the only one possible to get us out of this mess. What do you say?"

"You don't expect me to reply off hand that I am ready to take part in a plot to murder my husband?"

"Why not? You have already rehearsed the part with me."

The malice in his tone and face made Lola clench her teeth and flush with anger. But she did not let the hot words that rose to her lips escape them. Instead of this, she asked, as calmly as she could force herself to speak—

"How do you propose to carry out the plan?"

"Oh, there are fifty ways. Any one of a hundred drugs that can be got without difficulty will do all that we need, and any one of a hundred opportunities which

can be as easily found or made, will let us, either you or I, do it."

"And when would you propose that you or I," she paused on the words, "should do this?"

"The sooner the better," he answered, as coldly as if he had been discussing some trifling matter of every day routine. "I can get you the drug, or you can get me the chance, and to-morrow should see you free from your troubles."

"Even if I could bring myself to do what you ask," said Lola, "I could not do it at once. I must have time to nerve myself."

"You needed no time on the Devil's Rock," he said, hastily.

"I will not do this without consideration. To-morrow I will give you an answer—yes or no."

"You are a fool, Lola. Any hour may bring that girl Leycester back here, or she may write her cursed knowledge. We dare not delay an unnecessary hour."

"You know me; and that what I say I mean. I am not even clear that I will not denounce you myself to Sir Jaffray, and face all that may have to come. To be once more the acknowledged wife of a man like you is a hateful prospect."

"Better to be the wife of a man like me than the wanton of another."

"You scoundrel!" cried Lola. All the passion that she had been holding in check blazed forth at this taunt, and, raising the riding whip which she held in her hand, she struck him with all her force right across the face, leaving a crimson wale on his livid cheek.

His rage was so violent that he trembled with the force of it, and rushing forward he tore the whip from her hand and flung it to the other end of the room.

"You she-devil!" he muttered, glaring into her face with murder in his eyes, while Lola faced him without flinching, and smiled scornfully at the mark on his face.

He watched her warily and cunningly for a moment, and then darting forward seized her and commenced to struggle with her, striving to force her backward to a sofa, rage lending strength to his supple, sinewy form.

She struggled on her side, putting forth all her strength, which was very great for a woman, and for a time she resisted him and held him in check. She would not scream, and did not utter a sound.

But the struggle was an unequal one, and gradually she felt herself beginning to lose way before him. Her riding habit hampered her, and she began to fear that he would overpower her. She strove hard to think how she could prevent him from hurting her without calling for assistance from the servants.

Not for a moment did she lose her presence of mind, though she knew well the desperate character of the man she had to deal with; and it was only in the last extremity, when she felt that she could not continue the struggle and that her life would be in danger if she did not have help, that she resolved to cry for assistance.

But there was no need.

Just at that moment they both heard the sound of a horse's gallop and the stamping of its feet as the rider checked it, throwing it upon its haunches, just outside the window.

It was Sir Jaffray, and the sight brought the Frenchman to his senses.

In another minute Sir Jaffray, looking very white

and stern and carrying his heavy hunting crop in his hand, entered the room.

Lola, exhausted and breathless with her efforts, had sunk upon a low chair, while her late assailant stood upon the defensive.

CHAPTER XVI.

HORSEWHIPPED.

Sir Jaffray's first thought was naturally for Lola.

"Are you hurt, my darling?" he asked, crossing to her, and bending lovingly over her.

"No, it is nothing. Oh, I am so glad you have come;" and now that danger for herself and the excitement were over, she was far more unsteady and unnerved than she had been before.

She began now to fear the effect of an encounter between the two men, and felt that in a moment all that she had striven to gain might be lost. She clung to Sir Jaffray's arm, and would not release him.

"Let me go, dear one. And you, go to your room. Leave me to deal with this—gentleman."

But she would not, and clung to him still.

"Come, Lola," in a voice that she knew must be obeyed.

"I will stay," she said, and then loosed his arm.

"I do not wish it," said the baronet, firmly.

But Lola would not yield.

"I would rather," she answered.

"As you will then," said Sir Jaffray, shortly.

Then he turned to Pierre Turrian, who had been watching the pair closely and thinking rapidly what to do.

The minute's breathing space which Sir Jaffray's hurried questioning of Lola had afforded, had given time for reconsideration, and had changed the current

of the Frenchman's thoughts, and so the whole development of after events.

At the moment of Sir Jaffray's entry, Pierre Turrian's first instinct had been to save himself from an exceedingly awkward complication by throwing the baronet's anger on to Lola, and exposing the true character of the relations between her and himself.

But the minute's consideration caused him to change his intention completely. If he were to do anything of the kind, all chance of benefiting by Lola's connection with the baronet would be gone. He would have lost his hold over her entirely, and the whole object, which he had so long and so closely cherished, would be sacrificed.

On the other hand, all that there was to fear was an unpleasant experience with Sir Jaffray's riding crop—a fight in which he might or might not get the worst, followed, of course, by expulsion from the house. But he would still have Lola in his power, and still be able to reap the reward he was striving for.

He measured up Sir Jaffray's strong, well-knit frame, and recognized the certainty that he could not hope to escape without some hard blows; but—the stake was worth winning.

He had his tale ready, therefore, as soon as Sir Jaffray came toward him.

"How dare you lay your hands on my wife?"

"I answer no man who speaks to me in that tone, and backs his words with a weapon, while I am defenseless," he replied, with a good assumption of boldness.

"This is no weapon," said the baronet, angrily, "in any such sense as that. It is merely a horsewhip for the back of a dastardly coward who dares to strike a woman."

Pierre Turrian made no reply, but he folded his arms across his chest, and stood staring resolutely at his opponent, the mark of Lola's whip flaming like a brand of red shame on his face.

"Look out," was Sir Jaffray's only word, and the next moment the long strong lash of the hunting whip curled round the Frenchman's shoulders. It was like the first taste of blood to a wild animal, mad with pent rage, and Sir Jaffray seized him by the collar of the coat, and put his whole heart and strength into the swinging cuts which he rained on the Frenchman's shoulders and back.

Then at the close he went to the door and threw it open.

"Now, go," he said, hurriedly. "And let this be a lesson to you never to raise your hand against a woman again. Go, or by heaven, I shan't be able to keep my hands from thrashing you again."

To do the man justice he had passed through the ordeal with as much composure as a man can hope to show under a horsewhipping. He had neither winced nor flinched, though the hurt of the blows had seemed to strike right to the bone.

"I will go; and mark me, every blow that you have struck I will pay back a hundredfold. I swear it."

"Bah. Get out. This is not a theater," growled Sir Jaffray. Then seeing a couple of men-servants in the hall he said to them—"Turn that man out of the house, and if ever he comes here again, you have my express permission to kick him right down to the lodge gates."

With that he shut the door, and turned to Lola.

"And now, sweetheart, that the room's clear of that brute, tell me what on earth does it all mean?"

He sat down by her, and first took her hand in his

and then, seeing that she was very agitated, he ran his arm round her waist and held her close to him, and kissed her.

She was inexpressibly glad to be in his arms, for she had grown to love him with a love to the full as passionate as that which she had formerly simulated, and his demonstrative movements were rare enough to make her prize them all the more.

She nestled close to him now, and twining her arms about his neck, clung to him, and drew down his face to hers, covering it with long, sweet kisses, while her eyes filled with tears, which he could not understand. She knew well enough, however, that they were drawn from a too certain foreknowledge that such moments in their lives were soon to cease entirely.

It was a growing pain to her, too, to have to lie to him, as now she must, to account for this extraordinary scene with Pierre Turrian. And for the moment her wit failed to suggest even an idea of the tale she should tell.

She was completely unnerved and unstrung, in the moment of relapse from the excitement caused by the interview with the Frenchman, and the struggle in which it had ended, the tension when she had expected the truth to be blurted out, and the shock, half delight, half fear, of the horsewhipping.

Sir Jaffray on his side was very disquieted by the affair. In the moment of his arrival his thoughts had been too closely occupied with the burning desire to thrash the scoundrel whom he had seen with his own eyes molesting Lola, to heed what had happened before he came. His blood was set on fire by what he saw, and he neither cared nor stopped to think.

When he had sated that desire and had lashed the

man to his soul's delight and content, and sat waiting for Lola to speak, he grew uneasy as to what could possibly have happened between Lola and the man whom he had regarded as his friend, that could lead to such an end.

"How did this happen, child?" he said, when Lola's agitation seemed to be decreasing.

"I hardly know. I think he meant to try and kill me. He insulted me. You saw that mark on his face. I did it. I struck him with my riding whip. It was then he attacked me." She spoke in short sentences, like a child recovering from a fright.

"Did the man dare to make love to you?" asked Sir Jaffray, the thought driving his eyebrows together in a heavy frown and making him clench his teeth.

"I was always afraid of his coming here," said Lola, evasively. "You know I said at the time I did not want him asked. Ugh, he is loathsome and dangerous."

"Never mind, sweetheart, pluck up courage; he won't trouble us any more," said Sir Jaffray, in a much lighter tone than he felt, and wishing to cheer her up. "And if he doesn't clear out from the neighborhood of his own free will after to-day's business, I'll find a way of making him, that's all."

His mood of demonstrative affection had passed, and Lola, with a sigh, let him go from her side.

He got up and then lit a cigarette.

"It'll be a lesson to me not to encourage traveling fiddlers again. To think that he should turn out such a brute; and I actually liked the fellow. By gad, but I'm glad I thrashed him, and I'm only sorry I didn't lay it on a little longer and a good deal harder."

He paused and looked at Lola, and then said very kindly:

"Do you feel better now, sweetheart?"

"Yes, Jaffray, I'm all right now. I'll run up to my room and get my habit off. It must be nearly lunch time. Has the exercise made you hungry?" and she smiled.

Her spirits had risen for the moment at having got out of the work of explanation so easily, and she thought it best to appear as if she had shaken off the worse effects of the morning's events.

But as soon as she was in her own room and had locked the door and shut out the chance of being observed, she looked the truth full in the face.

The end had come.

With Beryl Leycester in possession of the secret on the one hand, and with Pierre pressing her from the other, there was no hope, no chance, no possibility of escape.

What to do she could not resolve yet. In the moment, she had to go on playing the part that she had chosen, but whatever the result a few days must settle everything, perhaps a few hours. If she was to avoid utter shipwreck she must be prepared with some definite course of action; and the sooner she could decide what that was to be, the better.

The very safety of the man she loved demanded this. She knew Pierre well enough to feel quite confident that he would now have a double incentive to do Jaffray harm. She had listened to his devilish scheme in order to learn what it was, so that having learned it, she might take measures to foil him.

But she knew also that he was quite capable of acting by himself from the outside, and so long as there was a thought in his mind that not only could he have revenge for the horsewhipping, but also be, as he

hoped, a gainer through Jaffray's death, the latter was not safe for a day.

She had reached this point in her thoughts when the luncheon gong sounded and her maid knocked at the door. Lola let her in and then changed her dress, and hurried downstairs.

At luncheon, Mrs. De Witt's curiosity had to be met and parried.

After her passage of arms with Pierre Turrian, she had been for a long drive alone, and this had not improved her temper. She had come back prepared to be very unpleasant to everybody, and especially to the Frenchman, and she was annoyed consequently when he was not at the table.

"Where is your fiddler?" she asked of Lola.

"He has had to go away, dear."

"Gone away?" exclaimed Mrs. De Witt, in a tone of great surprise. "Why, he said nothing of it when I saw him this morning. It must have been very sudden."

"Yes, it was very sudden and very urgent," said Lola.

"Is he coming back?"

"No," interposed the baronet. "The fact is, I had a row with him when I came home, and told him pretty bluntly that his visit had better cease. I'd rather his name were not mentioned."

"Oh, my dear Magog, that's simply impossible," cried Mrs. De Witt. "You excite my curiosity to the fever pitch and then say calmly you don't want me to mention his name. What's that but an incitement to go on mentioning it until my curiosity is satisfied. What has he done? He hasn't stolen anything, has he? It isn't anything to do with Beryl, is it? I saw them closeted together once, but that's all. Though

he is certainly a most original individual, and I should think a very daring one," and she flushed slightly in discomfort at the recollection of the scene at the piano. "But you must tell me why he's gone."

"I have told you enough. He went because I wished it. There is no more to be said," and the baronet spoke sharply and decidedly.

"That means I am to ask Lola when we're alone, that's all," retorted Mrs. De Witt. "You'd far better tell the truth at once because I shall only think there's some horrible scandal—and so will everybody else. Is it anything to do with you, Lola?"

Sir Jaffray looked at her and smiled.

"It's no use, little woman," he said. "Not a bit of use. You can't worm anything out in that sort of way. Besides, there's nothing to worm out that can possibly concern you."

"Thank you. I see you retain all the rudeness of old friendship, while withholding the old confidences," and Mrs. De Witt sniffed angrily.

"Just as you like," said Sir Jaffray, laughing, as he rose from the table.

Soon afterward he went away, leaving the other two alone.

"I warned you, Lola," said Mrs. De Witt, as soon as they were alone. "I told you there was mischief brewing, and that he was not hanging round you for nothing, with that air of possession of his. How did Magog find it out?"

"There is really nothing to tell you," was the reply. "You are so ridiculously far away from the truth, and are making so much of so little that you are almost willfully misleading yourself. Jaffray and M Turrian had very high words, and then, to my

great pleasure, the latter went away. I never liked having him here at all."

"No, possibly not," said Mrs. De Witt, in a tone from which much might have been inferred. But Lola let it pass without a retort.

"And, now, I am going to ask you a favor," she said. "There are, as you know, a lot of people coming here in a couple of days, and I have no end of things to see to. Yet I am anxious to hear what is doing at Leycester Court with Mr. Leycester. I wish you'd drive over there this afternoon, and ask for me how he is, and how Beryl is, and when she can get back here."

"You haven't the knack, as yet, Lola, of making your house very attractive to your guests," said Mrs. De Witt, ungraciously. She was as cross as a gossip-monger usually is at being robbed of what she deemed a toothsome morsel of scandal. "But I'll go over to the court, and I'll drive through Walcote to see if I can catch a glimpse of your Frenchman. I dare say he'll tell me the news."

With no more than a smile at this shot, Lola rang the bell, and ordered the carriage for her companion.

As soon as the latter had gone, Lola went to her own sitting-room to think out the rest of the problem. This had been her reason for wishing to get rid of Mrs. De Witt. She felt that she must be alone.

She had not been long in her room before a knock at the door disturbed her. She had locked it to prevent interruption.

It was her maid, who brought a letter on a salver.

"This has just come by hand, my lady, with a message for it to be delivered immediately to you. I thought it right to bring it."

Lola took it, and going back into her room opened it.

It was from Pierre Turrian, short, sharp, and menacing.

"You must be by the cottage at Ash Tree Wood, at the north end of the park, at nine o'clock to-night.—P. T."

Lola stood for a moment staring helplessly at the open letter, when the maid roused her.

"Is there any answer, mum?"

"No, none," returned Lola, hurriedly.

The girl withdrew, and Lola locked the door again behind her, and throwing herself into a long, low easy chair, strove to fight her way through a mist of thought to a clear course of action.

CHAPTER XVII.

FLIGHT.

It was useless to fight any longer.

That was the burden of Lola's thoughts as she sat with Pierre's short peremptory note lying on her lap.

She had done her utmost in the fight for happiness. She had striven hard to retain it in her grasp; but the fates were fighting against her, and there was nothing left but to own herself beaten, and accept the defeat as best she could.

It was hard to give it all up; hardest of all to lose Jaffray's love, and to feel that he would know her for a cheat and a liar, and worse.

She ran back in thought over the events of the time since her arrival in England, and smiled in self-contempt as she saw one after another the line of false steps she had taken. How paltry and unworthy seemed now the little ambitions which she had cherished then. How utterly weak and poor the objects for which she had striven.

To be the wife of a rich man she had schemed and plotted, and intrigued. And what had it proved to be? The one sacrifice that now caused her the least regret was that of her money and position. The one thing she dreaded to lose now was the one thing which she despised then—Jaffray's love. She had traded on his love to win wealth and honor for herself; the end was nothing but dishonor for him and a desolate broken life for herself.

Yet he had loved her; loved her like the true gallant

man he was. The thought cheered her, though it brought scalding tears to her eyes which she let gather and blur all her sight, and then fall unchecked. In all the years to come, and whatever might befall her or him, he would never blot out from his memory the love he had once had for her. And she loved the thought of that.

If only the truth could be kept from him for always! She would give her life, she thought, if that could be.

What would he think of her if she were to die? How would he feel if he were to come into the room and find her dead?

Now she recalled some words that Pierre had spoken about drugs that told no tale and left no sign. What were they? How could they be obtained?

How would it be to go to Pierre as he said in his letter; to seem to fall in with his plan to poison Jaffray; to get from him the drug for that purpose, and then herself take it? That would be easier than to find some poison by herself. Yet stay—there was no difficulty. It did not need any such elaborate preparation as that.

She had but to feign a bad headache with sleeplessness, and take a sleeping draught strong enough—for her to wake no more.

No one would think of poison. Her life lay all before her, bright with a dazzling promise of happiness, thought the world. How little the world knew! Two people would understand, however, and know the truth. The man who held her in his merciless power, and Beryl, who had guessed the secret.

What would they think? Nay, what would they do?

Would Beryl tell? She thought of the girl's cold, firm, deliberate nature, and for a moment wavered how to answer the question. No, Beryl would not

carry any feeling, however keen, beyond the grave. She felt that. If she had paid the penalty with her life, Beryl would be as silent as the grave in which she herself was to bury the secret.

But what of Pierre? As she thought of him, she was cold and sick. She knew too well what he would do. He would seek at once to trade on the shameful knowledge. He would tell the whole story to Jaffray; threaten him with exposure if he were not paid hush money, and thus hold him in bondage by the knowledge of her shame till Jaffray should come to hate her very name, and curse the day when he had grown to love her.

The gates of death were thus shut against her, and she felt that she must work out some other means of escape.

Not once in all her misery did she think of telling Jaffray. She knew him so thoroughly, and knew how he would turn from her act and her shame, that the mere thought of facing him at such a moment was more than she could endure.

For this there was another reason known only to herself, and the knowledge of it had set up in her mind hundreds of confusing thoughts, fears, impulses, and emotions. There was the hope of a little life that was some day to be born; and like a sword piercing the flesh and turning in the wound to prolong the agony, was the knowledge that the child, her's and Jaffray's, would be the child of shame.

She knew too well what Jaffray would feel and think, and say, if once this knowledge were forced upon him, and the fear and the shame and the love and the misery all blended to drive the wretched girl to distraction.

Gradually out of the blinding mist and sorrow an

idea began to take shape. If she were to see Pierre and lure him on to delay any evil plans he might have formed by promising to work with him, something might happen to prevent his doing any harm.

Or better still, if she were to fly from the Manor House, and let him know that she had done so, he might be driven from his purpose altogether.

She could see him that night at the time and place he had named; and then she fell to pondering all the points that occurred to her in this connection.

In the midst of this she was roused by a knock at the door. She made no response, but folded up the letter from Pierre and put it in her pocket.

The knock came again, firmer and more impatient, and then a voice, Sir Jaffray's, called her.

She rose, and wiping the tears hastily from her eyes, opened the door.

"There is a letter for you, Lola, from Beryl," he said, giving to her a letter, which Lola saw was fastened with a seal. Then seeing by her face that she was troubled, he said very gently. "What is the matter, dearest?" and he followed her into the room. "You have been sitting here alone," he added, in a cheerier voice.

"I am—not—not very well," she said, her lips trembling, and half refusing to frame any words at all.

"Well, read your letter; perhaps Beryl has some good news for you about her father. Read it, and then let me see whether I can't cheer you up a bit. You are so strong usually, that you startle me when you are like this."

She broke the seal of the letter, and opened it, and almost instantly shrank together, while a look of intense pain spread over her strained face, which turned as white as salt.

"What is the matter? Is he dead?" cried Sir Jaffray, alarmed, and thinking of Mr. Leycester. "Beryl shouldn't send news like that, so suddenly. The shock's enough to make any one ill."

By an effort Lola fought down some of her distress.

"No, he is—not dead," she answered, very slowly, as though the words pained her. "It was not—not that. I am not well, dear," she smiled faintly and weakly as if to reassure him. "I had a—pain in my heart. That's all. It's not dear Beryl's letter or—news. There's nothing—nothing about death in it. Only to say—she can't get here again for a day or two, and—would like me—to go to—her. That's all." She folded the letter and put it away in her pocket, where it lay against that which she had had from Pierre.

It might well cause her pain, short though it was. It ran thus:

"Dearest Lola—Come to me. I know the dreadful load you are bearing, and my heart is wrung for you. I know you are strong and brave, but the trial ahead of you would test the strongest and bravest. It breaks me down to think that it is to me that this has come to be known. Come to me and help me to shape the course ahead. When I think of you in that desperate man's power, I shrink with fear. Come to me.—Your friend always,
Beryl."

The end was closer than ever.

There was no mistaking either Beryl's meaning, or the kindness with which she wished to temper the blow which she knew her letter must strike.

But the blow had to be struck.

"Come to me and help me to shape the course ahead." Lola knew well enough the only meaning

which those words could have. The truth had to be made known, and that at once.

She turned cold and shivered at the thought, and seeing her shiver, Sir Jaffray, who had no clew to the mental suffering which she was enduring, set it down to illness.

"You are ill, Lola," he said, very gently and soothingly. "I shall send for Dr. Braithwaite," and he turned to leave the room.

"Don't go," she pleaded. "Don't leave me for a minute. Take me to your arms once more, Jaffray."

"'Once more?' What do you mean, sweetheart?" he asked in astonishment. "God forbid that my arms should ever be closed to you."

"Aye, God forbid it," she cried. "Now pet me and soothe me, as you used to wish to do in the days when I wouldn't let you."

He took her in his arms, and then sitting down in the long, low easy chair where she had been, he drew her on to his lap, and held her there like a tired child, holding her head to his heart and smoothing her face and her hair, kissing her and murmuring soft caressing words to her.

"You're not often like this to me," she murmured, opening her lovely eyes and glancing up into his, and smiling faintly. "Your touch is like what the wave of a mesmerist's hand must be when he wafts away pain.

For answer, he kissed her again.

"Have I made you happy, Jaffray?" she asked, after a long pause.

By way of answer this time, he hummed the snatch of a song, "If this be vanity, vanity let it be," an old teasing trick of his, when she had seemed to look for a compliment from him.

"Yes, I am vanity-to-day. But answer," she urged.

"My darling wife, I have never known since I was a child, and felt the presence of my mother's love, such happiness as you have brought into my life. That, from my soul," he said, earnestly, kissing her.

She kissed him in response, and lay for a moment quite still in his arms.

Then suddenly she asked:

"If I were to die, Jaffray, would it break your heart?"

"Don't, Lola. Don't even think such a thing."

"But I mean it. Would it?"

"It would close it against ever holding such a love in my life again," he answered, and his voice was like that of one in pain.

"I am selfish; but I am glad of that. I want no one ever to take my place; even to blot out the memory of this time, whatever happens."

"You are talking very strangely, child. 'Whatever happens,' what can that mean?"

"I am feeling very strange, Jaffray," she answered, taking his hand, and rubbing her soft cheek against it, and kissing it. "You laugh at my presentiments, but you do not laugh me out of them. I believe that if we could lift the veil that hides from us the next few days, we should see a trouble that might make us both wish we were dead rather than have to face it. No, hear me," she said, putting her hand on his lips when he was going to break in and interrupt her. "It is this which is frightening me, and it makes me anxious to get a pledge from you of your love. Don't blame me, and don't laugh at me; but whatever happens, remember to-day, and remember our love."

"Are you fearing anything that can happen, child?"

he asked, earnestly. Her words seemed more than a mere presentiment.

For a moment the issue to tell or not to tell hung in the balance, and she almost nerved herself to dare all, and open out her confession while he was in this mood. But he spoke, and broke the spell.

"I sometimes think, as I have told you, that there is something," and the tone in which he spoke drove back the impulse, and made her silent. She seemed to read in it an unwillingness to forgive, a sternness that she knew was in his character, and it chilled the words even as they rose to her lips.

So the moment passed, and nothing was said, save that she turned the question with an evasion.

"I am fearing something," she said, "and if only I could guess what it was, and what shape it would take, and what it would do, I should be better again. As it is, you must not scold me, but love me, Jaffray; always love me. Always, and bear with me when I am like this, but always think of me with love."

Then she was silent, and, after a time, when he had soothed her and petted her, she fell asleep in his arms, her last thought of him being that which a kiss suggested. He held her while she slept—it was not long—and thought of all she had said, and wondered whether it had any hidden meaning, and if so, what?

And he looked at her as she slept, and was pleased when a smile flickered over her face, and he kissed it before it was gone, and kissing her, he woke her, and she smiled still more broadly and sweetly.

"That is the sweetest sleep I have ever had in my life, Jaffray," she said. "In your strong, safe arms, kissed to sleep, and kissed to wakening. It makes me strong for whatever may come."

With that she rose, and with a laugh and a last kiss,

that his recollection of her might be all of love and brightness, she sent him downstairs happy and loving.

In all the time of stress and pain that followed, that last look of her haunted his memory always, and he learned to blame himself sorely for having been so dull and blind as not to have seen before him the storm cloud of trial and trouble and suffering that was about to burst.

As it was, he thought chiefly of her love for him, and only speculated in a vague and general way as to the cause of the moodiness in which he had found her.

At dinner time Lola did not appear, but a message came from her that she had felt uneasy about Beryl, and had determined to go over and see her.

"How odd Lola is," exclaimed Mrs. De Witt, when she heard this. "Why, this afternoon she got me to go over to Beryl, and then when I got back, I couldn't find her anywhere to give Beryl's message."

"She is anxious about Beryl, that's all," said Sir Jaffray, and so the subject passed. But the dinner without Lola was very constrained, and Sir Jaffray was more disturbed than he cared to show.

As soon as it was finished, and he was alone, he told the butler to find out what time the carriage was ordered to bring Lola back. The reply was that the carriage had been sent back without any orders, and that Lola was to return in one of the Leycester Court carriages.

This surprised him very much, and he ordered out a saddle horse and rode to Leycester Court, saying nothing to anyone of his intention.

When he came back his face was very stern and pale.

"Has Lady Walcote returned?" he asked, instantly, and the servant told him she had not, and handed him

a letter. Glancing at it, he recognized Lola's handwriting, and he caught his breath as if in pain.

"When did this come, and how?" he asked, shortly.

"A messenger brought it, about an hour ago, Sir Jaffray," answered the man. "He said he had been paid to bring it over on horseback."

"From where? Do you know the man?"

"He did not say where he came from, sir, and he's a stranger to me."

"You should have asked him," replied the baronet, angrily.

He held the letter in his grasp, and it seemed to burn his hand.

Holding himself in restraint he went quietly to the library, and having shut the door carefully behind him, tore open the envelope with fingers that shook.

The first words were enough.

He went to the door hurriedly and locked it, to prevent anyone surprising him in his hour of agony and humiliation and disgrace.

Lola's letter told him in plain words that she had fled from home never to return.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CLEW.

The letter which Lola had sent back to her husband to explain her flight was to him quite unintelligible, and the more he read it, the less could he understand her motives in writing it.

“My dearest—Would to God that I could still put husband. But my dearest, ever and always and everywhere. What will you say, what will you think, when you read this and know that we are never more to meet on this earth? As I write, you have just left me. Your kisses are still burning on my lips; your love warming my desolate heart; your touch lingering on my face and my hair; your truth keeping me strong in resolve to right you; your words of love singing in my ears. But that was our last caress. Now, our love is nothing but a memory; and this act of mine may even blot out yours. You will never see me again, Jaffray, and I pray you never to seek me. Between us there is a bar that nothing can break down, and though I am not altogether guilty toward you I am not altogether innocent. I would sooner have died than have done this. It would have been so easy just to die in your arms; but I could not take my shame away with me, and I think I have done what alone can cure some part of the evil that I have wrought. I cannot tell you what it is. I pray you may never know. To-day when I lay in your arms, I nearly told you all; nearly opened the flood-gates of all the sorrow and the pain and the distracting trouble, and just let it all come out. But something happened; a word you said or a tone I thought I heard; and I stopped, and all was blackness and gloom again. There is no way but this;

and no end for me but death, though that may not be yet. One thing I ask. Try not to think ill of me. Never believe I have not loved you with my whole heart. Never doubt that, in any wild stories which may ever reach you either as to the past or the future. If I am driven to what may look like evil and wrong and crime, remember it is only for your sake, and because there is no other way. And now, good-by, good-by. I can hardly write for the tears which scald my eyes. Ah, me! The last word I shall ever say to you. Think, Jaffray, the last word. My heart is as broken as my life. But I must say it. Good-by.

“Lola.”

The writing of the last few lines of the letter was bleared and blotted and irregular; where Lola had not been able to keep her tears from running on to the paper or to hold her hand steady as she had penned the words.

Sir Jaffray's eyes were dim enough as he read the letter, and tried to find some reason for what had been done.

What could it mean?

The letter was the plaint of a broken heart, and every word and syllable of it spoke of the love with which Lola loved him.

And yet she had left him.

He sat alone battling with the problem for a time, and trying to think what was best to do, and when he could see no gleam of light, he went out to go to his mother's room, carrying the letter in his hand.

As he was crossing the hall it occurred to him that he must give some reason to the servants for Lola's absence, and ringing for her maid he said that she had been detained at Leicester Court and would not be home.

Then Mrs. De Witt, hearing him, came out of the drawing-room.

"Do you know I'm all alone, Magog?" she said, in a bantering voice, and then, changing her tone at sight of his face, she asked: "What is the matter? What has happened?"

"Nothing is the matter in which you can help, thank you," he answered, deliberately. "I am sorry you are alone, but Lola has been kept at Leycester Court and will not be home to-night. I am probably going over there myself. Will you wait for a few minutes in the drawing-room and I will see you presently?"

There was something in his manner which shook all the frivolity out of Mrs. De Witt, and without a word she went back into the room, feeling grave and troubled.

Then Sir Jaffray went on to his mother's room.

"Mother, there is trouble. Help me what to think and what to do. Lola seems to have been driven by some cause which I cannot in the least understand to take the desperate step of leaving the manor. Listen to this," and he read the letter.

She sat and listened in the deepest pain, and not without some twinges of self-reproach, as she read between the words of the letter the evidence of a heart battling with an overwhelming sorrow and driven in upon itself for lack of the helping counsel of womanly sympathy.

The reading of the letter left her completely baffled and bewildered.

"What can it mean, Jaffray? What can the poor girl mean? Have you no sort of *claw*—nothing of any kind to guide you? What does she mean, 'Would God that I could put husband?' You don't—you've no cause to doubt her?"

"None," answered Sir Jaffray, sternly. "I would answer for her against the world. She has been driven to this last desperate act by something—heaven knows what—from which I could not shield her. Why, why did she not tell me?"

"What could there be to tell?"

"How can I even guess, mother?"

"Can we look to the past for a clew, do you think? Has she ever told you the history of the years with her father?"

"Never a syllable that would throw a gleam of light on such a mystery as this. Of course not. I tell you it is inexplicable, absolutely a mystery. But now there is no time for mere talk. I must act. I must be doing something or I shall go mad."

Lady Walcote paused a moment and watched Sir Jaffray as he walked rapidly from one end of the room to the other, grasping the letter in one hand, his stern, gloomy face bent forward.

"There are two people who may know something that may help you—Mrs. Villyers and that Frenchman, M. Turrian. You had better see them both," said Lady Walcote, deliberately. "If you can get a glimpse of her reason for leaving here, it may help you to guess where she would be likely to go, and so to trace her. You mean to look for her, of course?"

"I will never rest till I find her and bring her back," he cried, passionately, "if I spend the rest of my life in the search. But I am absolutely at a loss even to guess where she would be likely to go. And it drives me mad."

"There are people whose business it is to make such a search."

"Yes, I shall have down the best man I can hear of. But I want to be doing something myself."

"Then you had better see Mrs. Villyers and M. Turrian."

"I had a row with the Frenchman to-day, and kicked him out of the place. I can't go to him."

"You did what?" cried his mother, turning quickly to him in her astonishment. "What was it about? Lola?"

"Yes," answered Sir Jaffray, after a moment's hesitation. "I found the beggar actually trying to hurt Lola. I believe he meant mischief, too, and I horse-whipped him, and turned him out."

"You frighten me, Jaffray," exclaimed his mother, turning pale, and grasping the arms of her chair. "Can there be any connection between that and this?"

"I never thought of that," he answered, in a voice low and anxious. "I'll find him, and drag out of him every syllable he knows."

"Be cautious, Jaffray. He may be a dangerous man."

"He has more need to be afraid of me than I of him," he answered, and soon after he left his mother, and went away to make his preparations.

Remembering that Mrs. De Witt was in the drawing-room alone, and that he had promised to go back to her, he turned in as he passed the door.

She was sitting by the fire and got up as he entered. She looked very serious and distressed, and spoke without any affectation, as though the consciousness that he was in trouble had frightened her into being natural.

"You are in real trouble, I can see. If I can help you, say so. You can trust me, and a woman's wit is sometimes worth having."

"I will tell you to-morrow," he said. "Meanwhile——"

"There is no need to put off the news. Lola has gone away. I can see that—and you are blind. Where is that Turrian?"

He started at her words, and looked earnestly at her for a moment.

"I will tell you to-morrow," he repeated. "Meanwhile, you must excuse me for this evening, and to-morrow, I am sorry, but I must ask you to bring your visit to a close. My wife will not be well enough, I fear, to get back, and I myself shall be away."

"Why don't you trust me?" she asked, a little warmly, and with a suggestion of reproach and defiance in her looks.

"It is not a case of trust or distrust. But to-night there is nothing to tell."

"As you will," she retorted, shrugging her shoulders. "Still you can have my advice even if you won't give me your confidence. Find the Frenchman."

He made no answer, but turned and left the room and went to the library. Taking an old London directory he searched among the private inquiry agents until he found a name which he remembered—Gifford, of Southampton Row, London. He wrote out a telegram asking him to come down at once on an urgent matter; and this he sent by a mounted messenger to be dispatched from a town ten miles away, where the office was open all night.

Then he had a saddle horse brought round and he rode off fast through the night to Mrs. Villyers' house, to try and gather from her some clew to Lola's movements.

As he went he took up the train of thought which his mother's words had suggested and Mrs. De Witt had enforced. Was there any connection between that scene of the morning and Lola's flight? Had that

villainous coward anything to do with forcing them apart? By heaven, if he had—and under his breath Sir Jaffray swore a deep, strong oath—he should pay dearly for it.

But how could it possibly be so?

If the signs of a true and deep love were ever shown for a man, Lola had shown them for him that day both by word and act. Not for a moment would he distrust her; no, not if all the world were against her to swear away her faith and truth and love for him.

He would find her and bring her back. That he vowed to himself; and the thought that he could do it comforted and cheered him and lifted him in a measure above the choking flood of misery and regret. He would hold to that resolve. To that, and to his undimmed love for her.

When he reached Mrs. Villyers' house all was in darkness. It was late, and the household had gone to bed. Till that moment he had had a faint, flickering hope that he should find Lola there.

But the darkened house quenched the hope. If she had been there, there would have been some signs of an unusual stir in the place instead of the unpromising darkness.

He roused the household, and when the servants came shivering and irritable to know who it was and what was wanted, he learned that Mrs. Villyers was from home, and had been away for two or three weeks. Asked where she was, they gave him an address in North Devonshire. And that was all the information he gained by the long night ride.

Then he turned his horse's head homeward, choosing the road which would take him past Leicester Court on his way. He was half minded to go and rouse Beryl and find out whether Lola had, after all,

gone there; or whether she could help him in deciding in what direction to begin his search.

When he reached the court, however, he found the place in darkness as complete as that at Mrs. Villyers', save only for a light from the windows of the sick man's room; and feeling that he could do no good by rousing Beryl merely to put a question to her and to receive an answer which he knew only too well would be that Lola had not been near the place, Sir Jaffray turned his horse's head again and rode straight for the manor.

As he neared home an incident occurred which excited him almost beyond control.

He had ridden very hard and fast during the greater part of the distance, finding relief in the violent exercise, and quite unlike his usual habit, without a thought for the horse that carried him. But when he had reached nearly home, he noticed that his horse was very much distressed, and he drew rein to ease it, allowing it to walk. Then he found it had gone lame, and, dismounting, he felt in the hoofs, and found a stone.

Before he remounted he stood a minute or two on the turf by the side of the road, to let the laboring, panting beast get its breath. Then himself feeling stiff, he walked along a short distance on the turf, glad of the change from the saddle.

He reached in this way the outskirts of the Ash Tree Wood, the boundary line of his estates in that direction, and there was surprised to hear what sounded like the rustling of light footsteps in the wood. It was late, near midnight or past, and no one had a right to be abroad at such an hour.

Probably some rascal was out poaching, he thought; and at another time he would have welcomed the idea of a tussle. But now he was too full of real trouble

to be worried by any such trifling incident as the theft of a head or two of game.

He stopped, however, and listened intently, and as the moon was shining brightly at the moment, he drew cautiously under the branches of a dark yew tree, whose shade was wide enough to conceal both himself and his horse.

He was on the opposite side of the road from the wood, and he did not like to cross it lest the sound of the horse's hoofs on the hard ground, or the glare of the moonlight should reveal his presence.

As he listened he distinguished that the footsteps were short and quick, while it seemed to him that the rustling of the leaves as the person walked was continuous, as though caused by a woman's dress. But it was very difficult to detect any little signs of the kind.

It was clear, however, that the person was walking in his direction, and then he remembered that just at the spot there was a very rarely used footpath, leading to the road from an untenanted cottage which was now falling into decay.

A minute later his speculations were set at rest.

The slight gap in the hedge where the path emerged was nearly filled up by the rank luxuriance of the hedge growth, and Sir Jaffray saw the briars and branches thrust cautiously aside, and a woman's hooded figure fill the gap. She paused an instant as though in doubt.

The face was hidden completely in the shade of the hood which covered the head, but the figure was perfectly well known to the man, who was now watching with breathless interest.

It was his wife.

At that instant his horse, a very high-spirited and

nervous animal, took fright at the woman's figure, and, with a snort of fear, commenced to plunge and stampede, and the baronet's hands being entangled with the bridle, his efforts to quieten the animal impeded him completely, and to his infinite annoyance he could not free himself from the plunging, excited horse for some considerable time.

"Lola! Lola! It is I, Jaffray! Wait!" he called, fearful lest she should take alarm and rush away in ignorance of who he was.

As soon as he could possibly extricate himself from the reins, he let the horse go.

But Lola had disappeared.

He ran across the gap in the hedge, and standing on the threshold of the wood, called her name loudly, and waited till the echo of it came back from twenty different points, seeming to mock him.

Then he ran at the utmost speed he could use in such a place along the path into the wood, pausing now and then to call to Lola by name, and to listen for the sound of a word or a footstep.

But the place might have been the abode of the dead, and the figure he had seen a ghost, for all the sound or sign of life he could find.

Presently he returned along the path, resolved to get his horse, ride on to the house, and then come back and have the place searched. And as he reached the gap in the hedge again, he saw a small white object on the ground.

He picked it up, and it confirmed his opinion and deepened the mystery which baffled him so utterly.

It was a handkerchief belonging to his wife, and, as he held it up in the bright moonlight, he could see the name embroidered in black, in large old English letters across one corner—"Lola."

CHAPTER XIX.

"HEAVEN HELP ME, I BELIEVE SHE'S MAD!"

Nothing came of Sir Jaffray's discovery in Ash Tree Wood to help in unraveling the puzzle.

He had not had the wood searched, and had contented himself with searching it alone for some hours. He was unwilling that the discovery of Lola's strange conduct should be made in the presence of a number of the servants, and he resolved, therefore, that as he could not bring them to the place without telling them what they were to look for, he would not do anything till it was at least clear that Lola did not mean of her own will to return.

He reckoned, moreover, that as she had not left the immediate neighborhood of the manor, it would not be difficult to find her, whenever it should prove necessary to search systematically.

When the morning came, and he had been home about a couple of hours, he began to expect with feverish impatience the arrival of the private detective to whom he had telegraphed. He wanted to feel that the matter was in skilled hands.

When the reply to his telegram arrived it was to the effect that Mr. Gifford would start for Walcote at the earliest moment, and would arrive about mid-day.

Feeling his anxiety in some degree lessened by this fact, Sir Jaffray went out to make inquiries about the movements of Pierre Turrian, and to find him and drag from him the truth as to whether he had any connection with Lola's flight.

But there was not a soul anywhere who could give the remotest or faintest help in tracing the Frenchman. He might have vanished completely off the face of the earth at the moment of his leaving the manor lodge gates, so utterly had all trace of him disappeared. The servants, who, in obedience to Sir Jaffray's order, had turned him out of the place, said that he walked away in the direction of the village, and that they had watched him till a bend in the road had hidden him, and after that they had seen nothing whatever of him.

As to the clothes which he had left at the manor, he had said that he would send for them either the same day or the next; but no sort of message had been received.

The man had thus vanished, leaving no trace behind him; nor was there seemingly anyone who had set eyes on him after he had left the manor.

A little before noon Mr. Gifford arrived, and in a very business-like, shrewd way, absorbed the circumstances as Sir Jaffray told them.

The latter, half unconsciously, made the story as favorable as possible toward Lola, and his listener soon saw this.

"Excuse me, Sir Jaffray," he said, interposing at one point; "but it is absolutely necessary that you should tell me everything. I want from you every fact you have observed, and every circumstance that is connected with the case, whether you think it does or does not affect it. Speak quite unreservedly, please, or call in some other help."

"You can question me as you please," he answered, "and consciously I will not keep back a word."

And question him the man certainly did; but the fullest story of the facts did not seem to help them far.

"It is a strange case, Sir Jaffray. A very strange one," was all the verdict Mr. Gifford would give at the end of the interview. "You don't anticipate any foul play, anywhere?"

"Here is my wife's letter," he answered, pointing to it. "But for that I should certainly have dreaded it. This, however, points clearly to the fact that she left me voluntarily—though why, I can't for my life understand."

"You say the wood has not been searched except by you, and in the dark, too?"

"No. I have done nothing until you came."

"And you are quite certain it was your wife who came out of the place and stood in that hedge gap?"

"As certain as that I was on the other side of the road."

"Humph! well," he said, after a pause of thought "I'll go and look round a bit, so as to get my bearings I'd rather be alone, please," he added, when Sir Jaffray rose to go with him, and he went.

When he had gone, Sir Jaffray went up to his mother and told her the progress of matters and the absolute impossibility of finding any trace of M. Turrian's movements. Then he occupied himself in seeing Mrs. De Witt away, and was not satisfied, and did not leave her, until he had seen her being driven away to the station.

After that he was restless and miserable, longing for something to do, and fretting impatiently at enforced inactivity, until in the afternoon to his immense relief, Beryl Leycester came. She was looking worn and anxious with her nursing, but was in higher spirits, because her father had rallied and was much better.

She had heard nothing of what had happened at the Manor House, having been shut up close in the sick-room, and she had come over to carry a stage further the task which her knowledge about Lola had imposed on her.

Sir Jaffray welcomed her cordially. She was just the cool-headed, resourceful counselor he wanted, whose ready woman's wit would probably do as much to help him in unraveling this problem of a woman's act as anyone else.

"You are more welcome to-day, Beryl, than any woman I could possibly see, save one," he said, "and who that is you'll guess readily enough, if you know the news."

The girl flushed very slightly at the words, for old time's sake.

"What news? You look as though it were ill news."

"It is the worst it could be." She saw, on looking closer into his face as he spoke, that he was haggard and ill. "Tell me, is Lola with you at the court?"

"At the court?" exclaimed Beryl, starting in surprise.

"There is no need to answer," said Sir Jaffray, despondingly. "I had a last faint, flickering, wild hope that after all she might be with you, or that you might know something of her. Would to God you did. She has gone from here. Run away—been driven away rather by some means which it baffles us all to understand."

He paused a moment, and the surprise, mingled with the whirl of confusion which her own knowledge of the inner facts produced in her thoughts, shocked and frightened Beryl till she could not trust herself to speak.

Sir Jaffray did not notice anything more than that

she was much affected by the news, and, after a moment's break, he continued:

"She did not come to dinner yesterday, leaving word that she had gone to you at Leycester Court—you wrote to her in the afternoon, you know, asking her—and I was acting on a sort of impulse when I rode over to the court last night to see if she was there. When I got back this letter was waiting for me. Read it."

He gave Beryl the letter, and the girl read it carefully and slowly through twice, and knowing what she did, the misery and suffering in which it had been written seemed to strike right to her own heart.

"It is the saddest letter I have ever read. Poor Lola," she said, as she returned it to him, and noticed how he seemed to be eagerly expecting some opinion.

The letter had touched her keenly, and roused to vibration every chord of sympathy in her nature. It had, moreover, strengthened a resolve she had already made—to hold her peace absolutely as to all that she knew. Lola's piteous prayer that Jaffray might never know the truth should be held in absolute regard by her. Not a word should pass her lips.

Lola had solved the difficulty in her own way, and if only she and the Frenchman could disappear altogether, it might be the best way out of a maze which had offered to Beryl no key.

It seemed to her that Lola, finding herself in the midst of difficulties from which there was no escape, and which were closing fast round her, had accepted the inevitable, and had chosen flight as the only alternative.

"Can you help me with a suggestion, Beryl?" asked Sir Jaffray, after a long silence, in which he had seen the girl was thinking closely.

"There is evidently some influence driving her to this deed. Have you no idea what that can be?" she asked, in reply.

"None whatever. My mother seems to think that there may be some connection with the fact that the Frenchman, Turrian, and I had a quarrel yesterday, and he left"—and he described briefly the facts.

Beryl listened closely.

It helped to make the problem much clearer to her. The Frenchman had evidently told Lola what Beryl had told him; had probably tried to force her to join him in some wild and reckless scheme, and when she had refused, had, in his exasperation, attacked her with violence.

"Where is M. Turrian?" she asked.

"No one knows. He has disappeared absolutely."

It seemed impossible for Beryl, knowing all she did, to resist the open inference which these two facts prompted. It appeared as certain as anything could be now, that the two had gone away together—the man having probably forced Lola to do what he wished, possibly as a revenge for the horsewhipping.

"Well?" asked the baronet after another long pause, as though expecting from Beryl the result of her thoughts.

"I have no suggestion to offer, Jaffray," she answered quietly, grieved as she saw the half-kindled light of expectancy die out of his face, as though extinguished by the deep sigh he vented.

"I am so helpless. I don't know where to begin to look nor what to do. I know she is close at hand all the time—oh, I didn't tell you that," he broke off, noticing the start she gave at the words; "I saw her last night," and he described his meeting with her at the Ash Tree Wood.

It was now Beryl's turn to be utterly perplexed.

"It cannot have been Lola," she said. "It is impossible."

"Yesterday I should have said it was impossible that she would ever leave the shelter of my roof. But I have a new and horrible fear, Beryl, which I have not breathed to a soul—not even to the detective who is down here. It would explain everything, and it makes even her letter intelligible. She has not been like herself for some time now. She has had fits of moodiness and depression, in which she was haunted by dread of some terrible catastrophe which would overwhelm us all. I have tried more than once to rally her from these when I have found her so, and generally I could do it with a word or a caress. Yesterday she was like this, when I was with her in the afternoon—the time she speaks of in her letter here—and I have somehow come to fear that in some way the scene with that French villain may have unstrung her nerves till—till she has lost her mental balance and been driven to this rash and fearful act. Heaven help me, I believe she is mad, Beryl."

He broke down then, at the free utterance of the thought that had been forcing itself on him, and burying his face in his hands he yielded himself up helpless to the rush of mental pain that overwhelmed him.

Beryl sat watching him infinitely moved at the sight of his laboring trouble, but thinking that perhaps even that belief, which she did not for a moment share, was more merciful than a knowledge of the truth would be.

She herself could read without difficulty the meaning of Lola's fits of depression and fear of impending trouble; and she sighed as she recognized in it all the evidence of the struggle through which she had passed,

and the gathering clouds of doubt and misery which had beset her.

"If you read the letter, Beryl, in the light of that suggestion, you will see," said Sir Jaffray, after a long silence, "how everything seems to fit in with it. All that the poor girl says is so vague as to be in reality incoherent. Then it is plain that it is no interference with her love for me which drives her away. There is thus absolutely no cause whatever for her act, while the little trembling prayer that I may never know the cause is just what one might look for. If there were any real facts behind, she would know that I must find them out; but this—this trouble might be hidden. Then her conduct last night—all is consistent with that one terrible thought. When I think of it, I declare I am like a madman myself," he exclaimed, and then he began to stride from one end of the room to the other in impetuous haste.

Soon after this Mr. Gifford was shown in.

He was going to speak to Sir Jaffray, when he caught sight of Beryl, and stopped abruptly.

"Have you any news, Mr. Gifford?" asked Sir Jaffray. "You may speak unreservedly before this lady, Miss Leycester."

"Yes, I have news—and some of it strange and startling enough. In the first place, let me ask you what were the relations between your wife and the Frenchman, M. Turrian?"

Beryl started at the question, and looked eagerly at the man.

"They were only those of acquaintanceship. Years ago she had been a music pupil of his, and when he came to this neighborhood, some time since, I asked him to come to the Manor House, and subsequently

invited him to stay here. That is all; save for the scene I told you of yesterday."

"You mustn't mind my question, Sir Jaffray, please. But tell me, would he be likely to write to her?"

"Certainly not."

"Do you know the handwriting on that envelope, addressed to her?"

"Yes. It is that of—Pierre Turrian." The words came slowly as if by force. "That scoundrel has dared to write to her."

"It was found in her room last evening, and this letter may have been the enclosure. It was found in another place."

It ran as follows:

"You must be by the cottage by Ash Tree Wood, at the north end of the park, at nine o'clock to-night.—P. T."

There was a dead silence in the room as the man read out the words of the letter, and each of the hearers seemed to hear the other's heart beats.

"There is more behind. You must please to prepare yourself for a shock, Sir Jaffray, and you, miss, too. That letter was picked up within twenty yards of the cottage mentioned in it, and close to the wall of the cottage was found—the body of this Frenchman, Turrian, with a dagger plunged right through his heart."

Sir Jaffray and Beryl interchanged a lightning glance, and Beryl's pulse seemed to stop for a beat, and then go bounding on with double force as the news was told.

CHAPTER XX.

PIERRE TURRIAN'S MURDER.

Sir Jaffray was for the moment so shocked by Mr. Gifford's terrible news that he could not trust himself to speak.

"Wait, please," he exclaimed, impatiently, with a wave of the hand, when the detective was about to continue.

The recollection of his adventure on the previous evening, when he had seen Lola close to the scene of the murder, flooded upon him, together with the fear he had mentioned to Beryl that Lola was mad, and though he fought hard not to draw the inference which the facts suggested, he could not resist the conclusion which was forcing itself upon him.

That Lola was mad, and perhaps in some frenzy had been driven to do this desperate thing.

"Tell me, please," he said, after a long pause, "when was the body of this man found?"

"I found it myself, Sir Jaffray, less than an hour ago."

"How long do you think the man had been dead—to-day?"

"I can't say exactly. That's a matter for the doctors. But I should think eighteen to twenty-four hours about, or something of that sort. My view is that the time of the murder might very well be about ten or eleven o'clock last night. Might be before or might be after, but I expect that's what the doctor will say."

"It is terrible!" exclaimed the baronet, and relapsed again into silence.

Mr. Gifford began to get fidgety, and he glanced now and again at Sir Jaffray, and tapped with his fingers on the table, and on the cover of the notebook he held in his hand.

"There's a great deal to do, Sir Jaffray," he said, at length, "and time's short if I'm to be hot on the trail. And I've more to tell you, if you please, which I think you ought to hear."

"Go on," replied the baronet, promptly.

"There are three points I marked—and with regard to two of them I've done a very unprofessional thing, very unprofessional. But I, well, I was acting for you, and—well, I did it."

"Well?"

"I was the first to find the body, Sir Jaffray, and I thought I ought to make the most of the time. There don't seem to have been much of a struggle at the place, and I gather that whoever did this was standing talking to this man quietly, when, without a word, probably, she ups with the dagger."

"She?" interposed Sir Jaffray.

"And just drives it home between his ribs," continued Mr. Gifford, without heeding the interruption. "She must have been a rather tall woman, of great strength, because the dagger was driven right home to the hilt—the hilt touches the man's clothes—and I judge she was tall because the direction of the blow was a trifle down; whereas if she'd been short, the utmost she could have done would have been to drive it straight. You'll see my point, sir, if you'll just take this paper-knife, and watch the difference in its direction if you try to strike first at your level, and then at some mark above you."

As he spoke he acted in illustration of his words.

"I see what you mean," said Sir Jaffray, without attempting to make the experiment. "But why do you think it was a woman?"

"For this reason: In the dead man's clutch I found this piece of black lace, torn, I have not the slightest doubt, from the dress of the woman who struck him the death-blow. And the unprofessional thing I have done is to take that out of the dead man's hand and bring it away with me. Another reason is this: Here is a little curiously-shaped filigree gold keepsake, that was never made for any purpose on this earth, save to please the eyes of a woman. It looks like an Indian thing, or Japanese, and it's one of those balls that those Easterns are so clever in making. There's a bit of a wrench here where the thing seems to have been pulled off with a jerk. That I found lying close to the body, and that also I took leave to bring away with me. Those are my reasons, Sir Jaffray, for saying this is the work of a woman, and I venture to think that any twelve men in the country would find them convincing."

Sir Jaffray took up the little trinket and held it close, as if to scrutinize it.

But there was no need for any close examination.

Both he and Beryl knew it well enough.

It was the pendant of a gold filigree bracelet, one of a pair which had been bought in Mexico, when he and Lola were on their honeymoon. The companion to it had been given with several other things to Beryl.

Before either of them said a word, Mr. Gifford continued in just the same business-like way and tone:

"There is one other thing I should like to have done, more unprofessional still, but I dared not go so far. I wanted to bring away the dagger. This murder's

been done with a dagger that has enough character in it to hang a regiment of soldiers. I don't suppose that there's another like it in all the blessed country. But I couldn't touch it, you see, because the doctor would see in a trice that someone had been tampering with the body after death, for the reason that any boy student could tell when a dagger had been taken out of the wound hours after death. Then, there'd have been no end of awkward questions for me to answer as to what I'd been up to. So I had to leave it."

"What was it like?" asked Sir Jaffray, who now had come to expect that every answer the man gave would only incriminate Lola more and more. He was right in this case.

"It's a smallish affair, but very deadly, I should say. The haft is a singular reddish kind of porpoise or alligator hide, with three rings of horn running round it to give the holder a firm grip; and these rings are of different colors, while the steel which shows up the back of it is studded with tiny bronze knobs, and the extreme end of it is of bronze, and made for all the world like one of those slouch hats which the cowboys in the Wild-West are generally pictured as wearing—only, of course, very, very small. I never saw such a thing before, and I should know it again out of fifty thousand."

Neither Sir Jaffray nor Beryl dared to look at one another during this description, and at the close neither said a word.

Both knew the dagger only too well. Like the bracelet, it had been bought when on the wedding tour in America, and the fellow to it had been given by Sir Jaffray to Beryl's father, and it was at the present moment in the collection of arms at Leicester Court.

Mr. Gifford himself seemed to feel that there was some strong reason for the silence, and he made haste to break it.

"I must go. There's a lot to do. I thought I'd better bring these two things here," he said, pointing to the bit of lace and the little gold trinket—"and I'd have had the other if it hadn't been that it would have been seen at once. I'll keep this bit of lace. I shall want that, and you'd better say nothing about it. I suppose you want me to go on with the matter, Sir Jaffray?" And he looked up as if waiting for instructions.

"Yes, you must go through with it. Sift it to the bottom."

"There's not much to sift now. The man who puts his hand on the owner of that dagger and that little bauble there, and this scrap of lace, won't have any difficulty in finding the murderess of the Frenchman."

His two hearers shuddered at the words.

"I'm not at all sure that you're right," said Sir Jaffray. "But you must find out—at any cost. Of course," he added, with some hesitation, "you understand that you are acting privately for me, and you have no need to tell anything of what you find out to anyone else. Your fees will be paid by me."

The man's eyes gleamed in an instant with a sort of restrained avarice.

"I have done my best, Sir Jaffray. I know the extreme pain and trouble which may often be saved by a little silence. If you will excuse me now I will go. You know all so far. I had better be out and doing, because the police make such mistakes at times."

He took his hat and went away, and Sir Jaffray and Beryl remained aghast at the story to which they had listened and all that it threatened.

Sir Jaffray was standing by the window leaning against the side shutter and pressing his head heavily against his hand, while Beryl sat quite still in her chair by the table, pressing her hands together feverishly in her lap, and feeling so chilled that she trembled violently.

"She must be mad. It is the only possible cause," burst from Sir Jaffray, like a moan of pain.

Then a knock was heard at the door and Mr. Gifford came back into the room again, shut the door carefully behind him, and advanced right into the middle of the room before he spoke.

"Excuse me, Sir Jaffray, but there's a point which you'll perhaps like to have put very plain to you. I don't ask any questions about the ownership of that dagger, but of course you'll see that a great deal must turn on it. I don't know whether you think that the grave complications which would certainly arise if it were proved to belong to anyone particular can be in any way avoided. But if that can be done, it should be done, and that without a minute's heedless delay. I thought I'd mention the point, that's all," and without saying any more he went away again.

Sir Jaffray hung his head in bitter humiliation.

But Beryl jumped up.

"Are you going?" he asked, as if disappointed at her leaving him. "I want to talk all this over with you. It's got to be broken to the mother, too," he said.

"I shall come back again, but I must go home. For one thing I want to see how my father is," she answered, without meeting his eyes.

She went out to her carriage, and getting in told the coachman to drive home as quickly as possible. In an inconceivably short time she was back again, and

she found Sir Jaffray still pacing the room where she had left him, fighting down the fears which would force themselves upon him as the result of Mr. Gifford's discoveries.

"What have you been doing, Beryl?" he asked, as she entered.

"I have been home, Jaffray. Mr. Gifford started an idea in my thoughts, and I have been home to carry it out. Let us be frank with one another in this terrible business. Have you any idea of what it all means, or of what we can do?"

"There is only one possible explanation—if this man's thoughts have any foundation. Only one. My poor wife has gone mad, and all these awful consequences are the outcome. I have been thinking, and thinking, and thinking about it all until I am almost mad myself," and he threw up his hands with a gesture of despair. "It is horrible, horrible, beyond belief, horrible. And I feel as helpless as a child."

"Well, I have thought of one thing that we can do," said Beryl, "and I have been home to prepare for it."

"What is it?" asked Sir Jaffray, eagerly.

"It is not necessary to believe all that Mr. Gifford says and seems to think, but we may act as though what he believes is correct, and do what we can to make any proof much harder. You heard what he said about the dagger, and we know to whom it really belongs, and we know what people will think if it is found out that such a weapon was ever taken from the Manor House."

"How can they help finding that out?" burst in Sir Jaffray.

"I have been thinking of that, and that was why I went home. You remember you brought home two of those daggers from America, and that one of them

was given to papa. Well, I have been to fetch it, and I thought that if it were placed where the other ought to be, supposing, as we fear, it is not there, that it would help to turn aside suspicion for a time at any rate."

"You are a true friend, Beryl," exclaimed Sir Jaffray, taking her hand and pressing it. "Let us go at once and put it there. It was always kept in that old oak cabinet in the blue drawing-room."

They went at once to the room, and found the dagger gone as they had expected, and the cabinet locked, but with the key in the lock.

In a moment the dagger which Beryl had brought was put into the place of the other, the outline of the weapon showing on the plush lining exactly the spot where it had lain.

Sir Jaffray locked the door of the cabinet and put the key in his pocket with a sigh of relief.

"I thought your wits would help me, Beryl," he said, feeling very grateful to her. "You were always a clever counselor."

"I have had another idea," she said. "That little gold filigree ball was taken off one of the pair of bracelets of which Lola gave me one. I have brought it with me, and I should like to put it back among her jewelry, as it will destroy another of the links which seem to have had such effect upon Mr. Gifford. Even if the rest of the bracelet should be found, and this is here among her jewelry, there is no connection shown."

"You are right, certainly right," exclaimed Sir Jaffray. "Let us go to her room and put it there."

They went up without saying anything more, and after searching ineffectually among Lola's jewels for the bracelet, they put Beryl's among them.

"What shall we do about the mother, Jaffray?" asked Beryl, when they had locked up the jewels.

"I will not tell her more than is necessary; but if there is to be any real trouble through this, of course she will have to be told. I am afraid for her, and she will feel it the more keenly and brood on it so much because she is alone."

"My father is much better. If you like I will stay with her to-night and much of to-morrow; but I must drive back first and tell papa."

"You will take one great load off my shoulders if you will," said Sir Jaffray, inexpressibly thankful to her.

"I will go to her now," said the girl, quietly, "and I will tell her all that need be told, and as gradually as possible."

They had reached the bottom of the staircase. The baronet stood in the great hall, Beryl being two or three stairs above him with her hand on the balustrade, in the act of turning back to go to Lady Walcote.

"Your presence in the house is a great comfort, Beryl," said the baronet. "I can't thank you yet as I would."

"I am sorry for all the trouble that has come to you, Jaffray," she answered, pausing to look down on him. "If I can help you, of course, you know I will. There is no need for any mention of thanks between such old friends."

At that moment there was a commotion in the hall, and Mr. Gifford entered followed by a police inspector.

"Here is Sir Jaffray himself, Mr. Borderham," said the private detective. "The inspector would like to see you, sir, about this most distressing affair."

"If it's convenient, Sir Jaffray," added the inspector.

"Certainly, Inspector, certainly," replied the baronet, "come into the study," and bracing himself for the interview, he led the way, followed by the two men, while Beryl went on slowly upstairs.

As she looked at them across the hall, Mr. Gifford, who was the last of the three, turned for a second and shrugged his shoulders and lifted his hands with a gesture which she read to mean that something serious had happened.

Then full of disquiet, she went on to Lady Walcote's rooms.

CHAPTER XXI.

BERYL'S RUSE.

Before going into her dear old friend's rooms, Beryl walked up and down the long, broad corridor for some minutes, plunged in the deepest thought.

She was half bewildered by the rapidity with which these terrible events were crowding one upon the other, and it seemed to her almost impossible that barely two days had passed since she had had the interview with Pierre Turrian which appeared to have precipitated all the trouble that had followed.

Out of the chaos of violence and mystery and death it was with the greatest difficulty that she could evolve any coherent plans and ideas.

Holding the secret key to Lola's actions and her connection with the Frenchman, Beryl did not for the moment believe in Sir Jaffray's theory of madness. Whatever she might be, Lola was no more mad than Beryl herself.

Yet the girl shuddered at the alternative belief which this necessitated.

She recalled the story which Pierre Turrian had told at the dinner table, and the incident which he had afterward denied—that Lola had in truth thought and sought to kill him by stamping on his hands when he hung helpless clinging to the rock ledge at her feet.

If she could do that——!

If she was mad, it was only in the sense of being goaded to momentary madness of passion in which she might have driven this dagger into her persecutor's

heart, as she had before crushed his fingers in her paroxysm.

It was an awful deed; but knowing the man, Beryl could not bring herself to say it was at all an impossible thing for Lola to have done, and her feeling for the unfortunate victim of this villain's cruel cunning was much more that of pity than of censure.

Nor did her pity stop short at the commission of the crime.

If she could have gone to her now and helped her, Beryl felt that she would do so cheerfully. It was a fearsome deed to have wrought; but Lola had been driven to bay.

Beryl had been glad thus to have an opportunity of fending off some of the suspicion which had threatened her, and she vowed to do all she could to help her in any way.

The sin had been grievous; but the punishment had been swift to follow and terrible to bear, and so far as lay in her power, Beryl vowed that she would lighten rather than increase it.

The question was, however, where Lola had fled. It was clear that she must have gone away during the night, after she had been seen by Sir Jaffray. Her course up to that time was plain enough to Beryl. The Frenchman had manifestly begun to torment her in consequence of his failure to get Beryl herself out of the way. In the middle of the interview between the two, Sir Jaffray had appeared and turned the Frenchman out of the house. Then he had written to Lola to meet him and she, fearing possibly some violence, or may be motivated with a desire for revenge, had taken her dagger with her. They had met by the cottage, and in a moment of passion she had stabbed him and killed him. Then, when making off, she had tried to

leave the wood, and had been frightened by the appearance of Sir Jaffray.

Owing to his trouble with the restive horse he had been unable to follow her at once, and she had thus hidden and managed to evade him, slipping out of the wood in the darkness and away probably to some railway station. That was the manifest reason of the conduct which to Sir Jaffray had seemed like the planless and purposeless wanderings of a lunatic.

Beryl's heart bled as she thought of what Lola must have suffered during the night and since the moment of the terrible deed by the wall of the ruined cottage in Ash Tree wood.

The girl went in to Lady Walcote undecided how much to tell her of all that had happened.

The old lady welcomed her warmly. She loved the girl, and now in the time of the sorrow and trouble which had fallen on the house, she was infinitely glad of the comfort of her presence.

"This is a sad house, Beryl," she said, after she had kissed her and made her bring a stool and sit close by her knees. "I have been sitting alone here thinking and thinking till my poor brain reels and is dizzy with it all. How is Jaffray now? Where is he? He has been like one distracted. Oh, Beryl, how could she treat him so?"

"There is much that we cannot yet understand, dear," answered Beryl, soothingly. "Do you know Jaffray's thoughts? He fears that Lola has for the time gone out of her mind."

"No, it is not that," said the old lady, decisively. "You don't think that, I am sure. She has deceived him. She is bad, Beryl, bad to the core. She comes of a bad stock, and is bad herself. That Frenchman is

mixed up in this in some way. I never liked him; always suspected him, with his handsome face and his lying tongue."

"She loved Jaffray," began Beryl, when Lady Walcote burst in bitterly:—

"Yes, as Delilah loved Samson; or Jael, Sisera; and as Circe used to love the fools she turned to swine. Women don't elope from those they love and with those they hate, do they? Nonsense, child. When you've lived as long in the world as I have, you'll learn to know falsehood when you see it, and lies when you hear them. She never loved Jaffray, never."

"No, you are quite wrong," answered Beryl, in a firm, clear tone. "And some day you'll be the first to own it."

"I don't see why you should take her part."

"The day will come when you will do the same, dear," answered Beryl, sweetly, smiling and stroking the old woman's hand. "For I have never known a heart in trouble turn to you for sympathy in vain."

"I have no sympathy for the woman who wrongs and shames my son," was the angry reply.

"You have no strength to close your heart against the plaint of genuine and desolate misery."

Lady Walcote shook her head and made as if to reply again sternly, but meeting Beryl's eyes, said nothing, and contented herself with the unspoken assertion of her sternness.

"You must banish all that hardness," said Beryl, after a pause, "and collect all your strength of endurance. There is more trouble than even this flight of Sir Jaffray's wife. This Frenchman, who left yesterday, is dead—died suddenly under circumstances which suggest that he was killed by violence."

"Is there no end to the scandal which that man

brings upon us all?" exclaimed Lady Walcote, wringing her hands. "How did it happen? Tell me."

Beryl told as much of the case as she thought necessary, and parried the questions which Lady Walcote put to her, and she was still occupied thus, when a servant knocked at the door and said that Sir Jaffray wished to see her in the library.

With Sir Jaffray matters had reached a point that seemed to promise an ugly crisis.

The local inspector was a man of some surface shrewdness, and as he was very anxious to find an opportunity of helping forward his own promotion, and thought he could see in this case one that might help him, he was resolved to make as much of it as possible. At the same time he had all an English policeman's respect for a baronet of such wealth and influence as Sir Jaffray Walcote.

"I have come to ask you, Sir Jaffray, whether you can give me any information as to this unfortunate affair. I believe you identify the deceased man?"

"Oh, yes. He is a M. Pierre Turrian, a Frenchman, or a Swiss, I think; a musician, who has been staying in this country in pursuit of some musical object, and for the last two days has been stopping here in the manor. He left yesterday, suddenly."

"Can you tell me why he left?"

"I had words with him and told him to go."

"Can you tell me what the quarrel was about?"

"I can, if necessary, but it was a purely private matter."

"I should like to know."

"Very well, then, I will consider about telling you."

The inspector received the answer with a bow.

"Do you know of anyone who knew him at all, and

who might under any circumstances have a grudge against him?"

"No; of no one. I should think I was as hot against him as anyone could be," said Sir Jaffray, with a grim smile. "I horsewhipped him yesterday. I may say that I returned home in time to find him insulting my wife, and, in fact, assaulting her; and I horsewhipped him and turned him out of the house. That is the whole matter."

"Will it be convenient for me to see Lady Walcote presently?"

"No, I am sorry to say. For the present it is impossible. She has left the manor."

"Left the manor?" echoed the inspector, in manifest surprise. "Do you mean—in what sense do you mean left?" he asked, changing the form of his question.

"I mean only that she has left the manor, and that for the moment I do not know where she is."

Inspector Borderham concealed the impression which this fact made upon him, by stooping over his notebook and taking an elaborate note.

"This is very surprising intelligence, Sir Jaffray," he said at length.

"It is a very painful fact, Inspector," replied the baronet.

"Will you tell me under what circumstances she left, and whether you connect the fact in any way with—with the man who is dead?"

"Certainly I do not," answered Sir Jaffray, promptly and firmly. "I cannot say to-day exactly what are the circumstances which have led to her leaving the manor—I shall be able to do so in a day or two, of course—but I am certain there can be no more connection than that of a coincidence in time."

"Did her ladyship leave before or after this M. Turrian?"

"After. She did not go until the early evening, leaving word that she was going to Leycester Court. It was some time before dinner. The man had been gone some hours."

"Had there been any communication between the Frenchman and her ladyship?"

"None, to my knowledge. There has been some whisper to that effect; but I do not attach any belief to it whatever."

"Will you tell me what were the relations between her ladyship and this French gentleman? Were they cordial?"

"On the contrary. My wife objected very strongly to his coming to the house; and, to my infinite regret, it was by my wish and invitation, and quite against her wish, that he came to stay here."

"Who saw him last when he left here?"

"Two of the servants. I told them to turn him off the premises."

"Can I see them?"

In reply, Sir Jaffray rang the bell, and the two men were summoned and questioned by the inspector, and then sent away.

"Could you tell me how Lady Walcote was dressed when she left here?" was the next question.

"No, I cannot. I did not see her after about four o'clock in the afternoon, but her maid may have seen her, and if you like you can see her and question her."

He rang the bell and sent for her, but when she came she could throw no light on the matter of the dress.

"I did not see my lady after I gave her the letter which was brought for her."

"What letter was that?" cried the inspector, sharply.

"I do not know, sir. I don't read my mistress's letters. I know no more than I think it was the letter contained in the envelope which I found in her ladyship's room in the evening, and gave to this gentleman," pointing to Mr. Gifford.

"Very well, that will do, thank you," said the inspector, dismissing her.

When she had gone he turned to Mr. Gifford.

"What envelope is that? You didn't tell me."

"Didn't I? Well, that was stupid. I meant to. She gave me an envelope addressed in an ordinary hand, and with nothing in it, and I tore it up, thinking nothing of it." He told the lie well, with all the air of a stupid man who has been caught committing a blunder, and thinks to face it out doggedly.

"You made a bad blunder when you did that, Mr. Gifford," said the inspector, severely. "You should leave these things to those who are able to understand what is important and what is not."

"That's all very well, Inspector," retorted Mr. Gifford, with well-acted warmth. "But perhaps I know as much about the importance of little things as anyone else. If it had been the letter itself, I'll give in it might be worth something; but not even a provincial inspector of police could make much of an empty envelope addressed, so far as I recall, in a lady's hand. However, if you choose to think I've done wrong, do it and welcome;" and he sneered as if in somewhat contemptuous indifference to the inspector's opinion.

"There was a letter addressed to my wife on that afternoon in a lady's hand," said Sir Jaffray. "I myself gave it to her. It was from Miss Beryl Ley-

cester, and I believe I heard my wife say that in it Miss Leycester asked her to go over to see her at the court. Miss Leycester is in the manor now, Mr. Borderham, if you would like to see her."

"I should," the latter said, and then Beryl was sent for.

While they were waiting the inspector took from his pocket a small parcel and opened it, and Mr. Gifford began to feel much keener interest than he had yet felt, because he knew that it contained the dagger which he had described, and the remaining portion of the gold filigree bracelet of which he himself had found the pendant.

"I may show you these while we are waiting," said the inspector. "This is the knife with which the man was killed, and this is a bracelet which was found near the body, as if dropped in a struggle of some kind. Do you recognize either of them? I ask because I have been told that they come from the manor here."

At this moment Beryl entered the room; and Sir Jaffray and Mr. Gifford had their heads bent down examining the two articles closely.

"I wanted to ask you, Miss Leycester," said the inspector, leaving the matter of the dagger for a moment, "about the letter which you wrote yesterday to Lady Walcote. Can you tell me what was in it?"

"I asked her to come and see me," replied Beryl.

"Did she come?"

"No; nor did she answer me in any way."

"She left word here that she was coming to you, and you are sure that she did not come?"

"I am quite sure." Beryl looked closely at the three men, and saw that the matter had reached some sort of crisis.

"Then as to the weapon, Sir Jaffray, and the bracelet. Can you recognize them?"

"They are mine," interposed Beryl, speaking steadily and clearly. "At least that bracelet is mine, and that dagger is from our collection of curios at Leicester Court."

"Are you sure?" asked the inspector, unable to conceal his intense surprise at the turn to matters which this answer gave.

"I am comparatively certain," answered Beryl. "At least I am so certain that I shall be surprised indeed if it is not. This—" touching the bracelet—"was given me by Sir Jaffray's wife when she returned from America, she having an almost exact duplicate; and this—" pointing to the dagger—"is the dagger you gave to papa, Jaffray, unless, of course, it's the fellow which you kept for yourself. But surely we can settle that easily. I think I know some little marks on it. Let us go and see whether the other is on its place or not. It is in the blue-room, you know."

She spoke quite naturally and coolly, and led the way to the cabinet.

"It's locked. Do you know who has the key, Jaffray?" she asked. "There is the dagger. I knew this was ours."

Sir Jaffray produced the key, and the dagger was taken out and examined closely, first by the inspector and then by Mr. Gifford.

After that they went upstairs and looked for and, of course, found the bracelet among Lola's jewelry.

"I was sure of the bracelet, of course; and almost sure about the dagger. But now do you mean to tell me they have any sort of connection with this terrible deed?" she asked the inspector.

He explained how they had been found; and then exclaimed in the tone of a man absolutely puzzled and bewildered:

"Well, I can't understand it."

Soon after, he went away.

Then Mr. Gifford turned to Beryl with a look of indescribable cunning and shrewdness in his eyes as he said:

"I think you're one of the cleverest women I ever met in the world, but you made one mistake—there was no dust, not even a particle, on that dagger. But he didn't notice it. I was watching him."

And then, without giving her time to reply, he hurried away after the inspector.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MYSTERY OF WALCOTE MANOR.

The murder of Pierre Turrian soon spread over the whole country. It contained first those incidents which attract and hold popular attention, and for some days following the discovery of the body all the newspapers everywhere dealt with it.

The disappearance of Sir Jaffray's wife, the garbled accounts of the manner in which Pierre Turrian had left the Manor House, the apparently complete absence of any conclusive proofs of how the deed was done, and the social position of the people interested, made the "Mystery of Walcote Manor," as it was termed, a nine days' wonder.

Popular suspicion fastened on the fact of Lola's disappearance as strong presumptive evidence of her guilt, and in many papers the fact was commented upon in a manner which left no doubt whatever of the writer's opinion.

A hue and cry was started all over the country; and portraits of Lola, in all degrees of unresemblance, appeared in all manner of daily and weekly papers, while pen portraits of the most conflicting kinds abounded everywhere.

"If Lady Walcote knows nothing of this most puzzling mystery, why does she not come forward and explain her conduct?" asked one writer. "It is not we, who but point out the facts, who do her injustice, but she herself in not making public an explanation," suggested another. "The law of this

country very rightly holds all persons innocent until they have been proved guilty; and it is far from our intention," insinuated a third, "to attempt to reverse that proper attitude in the present case. But Lady Walcote and those friends who are advising her in this critical time must see that she and they are accepting a very heavy responsibility in not clearing up exactly her relation to this most inscrutable affair."

These were only some of the comments; while the reports of every incident that could be got hold of were greedily sought for and used; and at the inquest quite a small regiment of reporters appeared.

But when all was said and done and questioned, there was nothing that came out that really damaged Lola except the one fact that she had gone away under circumstances which no one could understand.

In the smaller circle of those who knew the facts, great curiosity and comment were aroused by the dagger and the bracelet. It was the latter which made the mystery complete; and Inspector Borderham himself was most baffled by this. As he said over and over again, he himself had found the bracelet; not a soul knew of its having been found until he got to Walcote Manor, and took it out of his pocket; and, therefore, he was most emphatic that the only course was to accept the position, and look for the person who had done the deed among those who could have access to Leycester Court. For Sir Jaffray himself the time was one of most distressing trouble; and his disappointment when Lola was not found, and did not of her own free will return to the manor, was keen and poignant.

"I am afraid she is dead, Beryl," he said, on the third day after the discovery of the murder. "She

has made away with herself in her sorrow and madness."

"There is nothing to suggest that; nothing more than there was two days ago," replied Beryl, thinking secretly that it could perhaps be the best ending for them all.

"Yes, there is the fact that she has not come back," he answered. "If, which Heaven forbid, she did this deed in her madness, and any knowledge came to her afterward of what she had done, she would do one of two things—either come back at once and own the full truth, or lay violent hands on her own life. I know her."

"There is time for her to come back yet. Suppose, as you say, that she did this in her delirium, she may yet be wandering somewhere in the same state, and may know nothing of what has happened."

"The whole country is ringing with news of the man's death. She could not fail to hear of it—if she were alive. I tell you, she is dead, and if her end is peaceful, it is best so." He sighed heavily. "It is an awful thing that I should ever have to say that about her. But I would rather see her dead than mad. And she must be one or the other, or we are all out of our senses."

Beryl did not answer this at once, but sat thinking out the problem as it showed in the light of her own knowledge.

"We may all be out of our senses in that respect, Jaffray. We may be judging her without cause."

"I would to God that I could think so," he exclaimed, with fierce energy. "I would give my life to feel sure of it. But I can't, Beryl, I can't. I have tried to piece the things together that you and I know, and to find in them anything but the proofs

of her deed, and I can't. Look at the things as I will, they lead me nowhere but to one conclusion. There is not a man in England who, if he knew what we know, would not think what we think. I don't understand the thing. I can't, except on the one supposition that she is mad. And it breaks my heart to think that."

He paused, but Beryl did not break the silence.

"The thing is all so horribly complete. I have talked it over and over with Gifford, trying to get from him a suggestion that may point in another direction, but all his ingenuity cannot offer a hint that the evidence doesn't utterly smash. It is perfectly clear that she left the Manor House before this man was killed; it is quite as certain that he wrote to her the letter telling her to meet him; it is clear again that she got the letter, and that she did go and see him; and just as clear that she was there and dropped that bracelet in the struggle with him; and—used that dagger. And then, on the top of all, comes this absolutely inexplicable flight. It would all be different if only she were here. If she would come here and lay her hand in mine and tell me she knew nothing of all this, I would believe her and hold out for her innocence against the whole world, mad or sane. But she doesn't come. And yet, I hate and loathe myself for harboring the thought that, mad or sane, she could even think of taking this man's life. And the strain of it all is enough to kill one."

Beryl thought it best to let him speak freely and without interruption.

"There is only the one thing that I have often mentioned to you that I can't fathom—whether there was any sort of understanding between Lola and that brute. I have thought sometimes—in fact, Gifford

suggested the idea to me, that he may have had some kind of hold over her; something that—but there, I won't try to think in that vein. I wish to heaven I'd had the beggar out and shot him before he caused all this trouble. She says in her letter," he said, harking back suddenly to the thought which he had started and left, and taking from his pocket Lola's last letter to him, already thumbled and soiled from constant reading—"that she was within an ace of telling me, when something I said stopped her. What a tactless, blundering dolt I must be! If I hadn't checked her, all this misery and tragedy and ruin might have been saved. Oh! how I have cursed myself for that clumsiness!" he cried, angrily.

"I see no need for self-reproach," said Beryl. "It would have been better if she had been led to speak, but——" she left the sentence unfinished, and Sir Jaffray looked at her as though to question her.

While he was thinking what to reply, the police inspector was announced.

"Excuse my troubling you again, Sir Jaffray," he said—he had already been once that day at the Manor House—"but I am on my way to the adjourned inquest, and I thought you would like to know that I have arranged to complete the inquiry this afternoon, and not have another adjournment."

"That is certainly what I wish, Inspector."

The inquiry had indeed been somewhat hurried over in deference to the expressed wish of the baronet; while that course also fell in with the inspector's own desires. He had been pleased enough to get the utmost publicity given to the case, and had himself secretly helped to insure this end by spreading some few unimportant but telling details.

But now the publicity was getting much greater

than he wished, and the comments were taking quite a different form from what he wanted. The papers were trying the case, and were handling him rather roughly in the process. Moreover, the details published were such as could not fail to put anyone implicated, however dense, on their guard; and to keep them posted as to the actions of the police. Hence the inspector's eagerness to stop the whole thing, and by limiting as much as possible the scope of the inquest, to hide the intentions and plans of the police.

His ambition was to burke the inquiry at the very moment when public curiosity was at the highest fever point; and then, suddenly, and as if by a kind of police magic, produce the culprit and the evidence of guilt. To do this he was prepared to go to quite unusual lengths.

"I don't think we need go into anything more now but the barest facts," he continued. "We shall have the medical evidence of the cause of death, that the wound could not have been self-inflicted, and that the blow must have been struck by someone else. That will be enough to warrant the jury giving a verdict, and that's what we want."

"What will the verdict be, Mr. Borderham?"

"There can be but one, Sir Jaffray. Willful murder by some person or persons unknown. That's clear. It's the only one that fits the facts."

"And you think the inquiry will finish to-day?"

"It really rests with me and the coroner, Sir Jaffray; and in truth we both thought you would prefer to have the matter ended as soon as possible. We can do no good by prolonging an inquest of the kind, and I am simply not going to offer any evidence which will be likely to drag it out. Personally, I don't like working in the light in that way, with all the country-

side knowing every step you take. If this thing's ever to be found out at all, it won't be by means of a coroner's jury. It's all a farce and nothing else. It's all right enough for a twopenny halfpenny tinpot case, where the facts lie as plain in sight as eggs in a thrush's nest; but where there's serious business, inquests are worse than no good."

"I see," said Sir Jaffray, shortly.

"Take such a thing as this matter of the dagger, now," continued the inspector. "Whatever would a coroner's jury make of that, I should like to know. Suppose I was to tell 'em all the facts—that the dagger was one of two, just alike, which you had brought home from America; and that the bracelet was one of two brought home just in the same way; and that whereas Lady Walcote was missing, and Miss Leycester here, was on the spot, Miss Leycester's dagger and bracelet had got mixed up in this crime, while Lady Walcote's were both lying where they had always been—one in the cabinet and the other in the jewel case—what do you suppose they would make of that? What could they make of it?"

He stopped and looked at both his hearers in turn, as if waiting for them to speak.

But neither of them said anything, and he continued:

"That would be a poser by itself. But now, just throw in a spice of mystery, and try to imagine what the effect would be. Suppose I were to read them a letter that has been sent to me to the effect that at the time of the death of this Frenchman neither the dagger nor the bracelet was in the manor here, but that both were put in their places afterward—put there from Leycester Court—what do you think they would say then? Why, we should have all sorts of wild

stories repeated everywhere, with all sorts of charges against all sorts of people. And how could I carry on my work of inquiry then?"

He stopped again, but only for a second, and it was evident now to both Sir Jaffray and Beryl that he was speaking with a purpose.

"But I don't work in that way. I simply leave that letter—of course, it's anonymous—out of the question. If I ask any question it is how the writer, whoever it is, comes to know so much about it? And then I argue thus: If the story be true, and these things were put back, no one knows anything about it officially and authoritatively except myself and the people who may be supposed to have done it. And what isn't known officially can always be contradicted. And if it were ever known to be true that anyone had, in a moment of misapprehension, done anything of the kind, and wanted to cancel the arrangement, nothing would be easier, supposing it is not officially known. Publicity, therefore, would be a huge mistake in all interests. No, no, Sir Jaffray, if this thing is ever to be traced, the tracing will have to be done quietly, under the surface, and altogether apart from any coroner's court."

He rose as he said this, and made as if to leave the room, and when he reached the door, he turned and said:

"You'll be at the inquest, Sir Jaffray? And I suppose there's no possibility of any mistake having been made; of any hoax having been played upon you and Miss Leycester in the matter of that dagger and bracelet? If it is possible in any way, I really think you ought to make some inquiries. It would be well to be able to give the lie to that anonymous writer."

"I shall be at the inquest," answered Sir Jaffray.

Then the police inspector went away, and the baronet turned to Beryl, feeling very uneasy at the unexpected turn matters had taken in regard to the replacing of the dagger and bracelet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"HER LADYSHIP, SIR JAFFRAY."

For some time after the police inspector's departure neither Sir Jaffray nor Beryl spoke a word, both being overcome with astonishment at the hints which Inspector Borderham had dropped.

Beryl was the first to speak, and characteristically took the blame upon herself.

"It is my fault," she said. "Oh, Jaffray, I am so sorry!"

"No, no, Beryl, I can't let you blame yourself. I ought to have seen what would certainly happen; though, now that it has happened, I am bound to say I am taken absolutely by surprise. Who can possibly have noticed that the things were absent for a time, and then put back? At most there can only have been a few hours during which they could be missed. I wonder," he cried, and then stopped and exclaimed: "That is too dreadful a thought!"

"What is that?" asked Beryl, anxiously.

"Can it be possible that anyone can have seen Lola take that dagger out of the cabinet?"

"I had not thought of that. It can't be possible. Even if she did take it, she would surely be cautious not to be seen."

"If?" he repeated; "if? I wish with all my heart I could feel that if. What I fear is that in the frenzy in which she must have acted, she would be utterly heedless of anything and anybody; and not give a thought to the question whether she was seen or not.

But that is not the point now. I am mad with myself for having brought your name into this most miserable affair. The thing has been bruited all over the kingdom now, and to draw back seems as difficult as to go on."

"Why not go through with it?" asked Beryl, firmly.

"Because we cannot. It is a sheer impossibility. So long as there was no question asked, and the weapons remained to speak for themselves, there was no serious responsibility. Heaven knows, I had no intention of doing anything wrong. I know your object, Beryl, well enough, and I cannot tell you how inexpressibly grateful I am to you for it. But we have been wrong. We have tried to set the honor of our family before the truth, and now we see the result. I have tried to shield my poor misguided wife, and I've sacrificed you instead. I've been miserably selfish, just when I ought to have been most careful to guard you."

"I think you blame yourself without cause, Jaffray. I am not one bit ashamed of what I have done. I would stand up to-morrow in the face of all England and tell what I did; and what is more, I would do it again to-morrow. And I don't believe the bulk of people would blame me. If they did, I should not care," she added, flushing in her enthusiasm; "if I had helped you."

"Spoken like my dear, dear old friend and playmate, Beryl," he said, taking her hand and pressing it. "You brace one's faith in human nature; and I believe with you that the world would not blame you for what has happened. But that would only make my responsibility the greater. But now, there is no use in regretting. I must find out what we can do."

"Do you think really that Mr. Borderham has had that letter?"

"Unquestionably I do, and, what is more, he means us to understand that he will act upon it if I make it necessary for him. I will go to the inquest and hear what transpires, and then I will have a talk with Gifford. I must speak plainly to him."

"He knows," said Beryl.

"How do you mean?" asked the baronet, quickly.

Beryl told him what Mr. Gifford had said to her about the absence of dust on the dagger, and the significant way he had spoken.

Sir Jaffray listened with a gathering frown of regret and annoyance.

"Borderham may have suspected it even then," he said. "Those men don't carry about faces like open books. I'll speak to Gifford and see what happens at the inquest. Meantime, try to think I am really and honestly troubled to have brought this on you."

He stood for a moment near her as if going to say more, and Beryl, thinking this, did not reply. But he said nothing, and at the close of a somewhat embarrassed pause he went out of the room, just turning by the door to smile to her.

She was a little puzzled by his conduct, and with a frown of perplexity on her forehead she sat for a minute or two thinking of it all. Then she smiled to herself very slightly and murmured, "I'm glad I did it. Whatever happens they can't do anything very dreadful to me, and Jaffray must see I did it for his sake." Then she went upstairs to Lady Walcote's rooms.

At the inquest everything went on as Inspector Borderham had anticipated. He offered just such evidence as he thought necessary, and the coroner

summed up the case on the evidence presented. One juryman was disposed to question the desirability of not going into more of the facts, but the other eleven, who had been drawn carefully from the Walcote estates, took their cue from the foreman, and declared themselves perfectly satisfied, and gave their verdict in the exact terms the inspector had prophesied that they would.

"And now," said the inspector to Mr. Gifford and Sir Jaffray, when it was all over and the court room was emptying fast, "now begins the serious business of the investigation."

"You've had some anonymous letter, I hear, about the weapon," said Mr. Gifford, to whom the baronet had already spoken. "Do you mind my seeing it?"

"Not in the least. Here it is," and he produced it. "You see the suggestion," he said, pointedly.

"And a most monstrous one it is," exclaimed Mr. Gifford, "a most monstrous one. I suppose you haven't a ghost of an idea who wrote this?"

"If I had I am afraid I could hardly tell you, Mr. Gifford," was the reply, given with a smile. "But I have not. I am thinking where to look."

"So am I," returned the other, shortly. "Who is there owes you a grudge, Sir Jaffray? A Miss Leicester, or, for that matter, Lady Walcote either. Hate of some kind inspired that letter."

"I am at a loss even to guess," replied Sir Jaffray.

"May I take a tracing of a bit of the letter, Mr. Borderham?" and without waiting for permission, Mr. Gifford did so, rapidly and cleverly, and handed the letter back to the inspector, and then Sir Jaffray and the private detective walked back together to the Manor House, the baronet explaining more fully all that had passed.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Gifford?" he asked at the close.

"I can't see it all yet. But I have a suspicion. I think the better plan will be to hold out against the inspector's hint, at any rate for a time. It's clear enough what he means. What he wants is to be spared the trouble of having to solve the mystery of the weapon, and somebody seems to want to help him. Who's that somebody?"

"I can't imagine."

"Exactly, neither can I—at present. But we must find that out. In the first place, is it a somebody at all, or is it just a dodge of our friend Borderham's? If he had a ghost of an idea that anything of the kind had been done, it's all on the cards he'd get such a letter written to himself, just to bounce us into throwing that trump card down on the table. It stands to common sense that he'd give a lot to get the difficulty of that dagger business cleared up; and if he could show that it really was Lady Walcote's dagger and not Miss Leycester's, it would be a good enough thing for him to conclude that Lady Walcote was the person wanted. And don't make any mistake; that inspector would give half his nose to spot the truth in this thing. I never saw a man keener. He scents promotion in it, removal to a busy center, and reputation as a clever spot, I mean detective. I know him."

"His manner was in the highest degree courteous to me," said Sir Jaffray, in reply.

"'Cause he's no fool," was the blunt answer. "He wants to stand well with you, and if anything is to be found out that will pain you, to have it seem to be forced out. But he's quite clever enough to try and

use you all the same, Sir Jaffray. You see he argues in this way. If there's been any exchange of these daggers he can frighten you to go running off to your solicitor in the fear that you may be involved as some sort of accessory——"

"Do you mean," began the baronet, hurriedly, taking alarm for Beryl's sake at the other's words, and bursting in with his interruption.

"Wait a moment, sir, please; and try and hear what I have to say. He wants to frighten you to go rushing off to tell some very respectable, steady-going solicitor all the facts, knowing full well that such a man's first advice will be to you to take Borderham's hint and make the change again while the chance seems open——"

"If there is any possibility——" interrupted Sir Jaffray again, when his companion cut him short once more.

"Please, please, please, allow me, and do try to hear me patiently. If you do that Borderham will not hesitate one minute. He'll be off to the nearest J. P., and get a warrant for Lady Walcote's arrest. At present he has absolutely nothing to go on, bar the fact of her ladyship's absence, and the circumstance that there was a quarrel on the morning of the day about her, as the result of which you turned the Frenchman out of the house. That's all the evidence he's got, because we've got all the rest; and at the best, it's only mere flimsy suspicion. But add the fact of the dagger found in the man's heart being the property of her ladyship, and you have just that substantial evidence on which a man can work and act. You see that?"

"Yes, yes. Of course," assented the baronet, hurriedly.

"Exactly. Well, then, if it's bounce, it's clear that you had better not give the thing away yet. But I'm not disposed to think it's bounce. I believe he did receive a letter."

' Well, but who could send such a thing?'

"Precisely. We'll see about that presently. First, let us see what we ought to do in this matter, supposing the letter's genuine. What can he do? He won't threaten you. He knows better than to do that for personal reasons. If you were a poor and obscure individual, and if Miss Leycester were a wretched, friendless girl, nothing would be easier than to take you both by the throat, so to speak, and just shake the knowledge out of you. There's no difference between rich and poor in the eye of the law, you know, but there's a deal of difference between 'em in the hands of the police, I can tell you," said Mr. Gifford, dryly.

"As it is," he continued, after a pause, "the inspector comes to you, all soft-tongued and pleasant; hints that if you've been hoaxed you may wish to see that the thing is put right, and so on. I know all that sort of talk, and putting it bluntly, it means that so long as you don't speak he daren't try to make you unless—unless, mind you, he can get some definite, positive evidence. You needn't bother yourself one little bit about the thing yet, therefore; but when he comes, as he will, of course, you can just say that you wouldn't think of doing anything, because some skulking coward has written as an anonymous letter what a newspaper penny-a-liner might hint for the purpose of getting up a sensation. And if—excuse me giving you a hint—if you'll put on a little grandee manner, and tell him you are surprised he should let

himself be fooled by an anonymous correspondent, you may do a good deal to check him."

"This is all very distasteful to me, Mr. Gifford," said Sir Jaffray, after he had thought over the other's suggestion.

"I've no doubt it is, Sir Jaffray," returned his companion, shortly, "but the alternative is an immediate warrant for Lady Walcote's arrest on the charge of murder."

"But I object very strongly to any course that entails this deceit and falsehood. I have no right to put this indignity upon Miss Leycester. If she were questioned——"

"She'd be quite equal to keeping Mr. Borderham at bay," interposed Mr. Gifford, bluntly. "The world isn't a palace of truth, sir; and if we have to have a nodding acquaintance now and then with the father of lies, it needn't hurt us. But, of course, you can do as you like; only if you're going to do this, I may as well go back to town."

"But what do you expect to gain by keeping up this thing now that it is suspected?"

"Time, Sir Jaffray, which is everything. Let us put the thing plainly to Miss Leycester. I know what she'll say."

Sir Jaffray assented to this, and Mr. Gifford went over the whole ground with Beryl, telling her precisely what he had told the baronet, and leaving her to decide. Without a moment's hesitation she decided in favor of standing by what they had done.

"I don't like the deception, Beryl," said Sir Jaffray at the close. "When Mr. Borderham comes to question you, you will be placed in a most awkward fix. But I will do this. I will consent to saying nothing

for three days; no longer. Then, whatever happens, the facts shall be told."

It was left so, but there was no need for even so long a delay, for the next day brought a startling development.

The inspector came in the morning, and by his desire saw Beryl and Sir Jaffray together. Mr. Gifford was present.

"I want you to understand my position exactly, Sir Jaffray," he said, quietly and deferentially. "I told you yesterday of an anonymous letter which had been sent to me saying that the dagger and bracelet had been put in the places where we four found them after the death of the Frenchman. I have now had another letter which says that when Miss Leycester called here on the day of the discovery she drove hurriedly home and back again, and that before she went she had had an interview with Mr. Gifford here, who had told you of the discovery of the dead body and had given to you part of the bracelet, the rest of which I myself brought here. I am not able to answer the questions involved either one way or another, but I am sure you, Sir Jaffray, and you, Miss Leycester, and you, too, Mr. Gifford, indeed, will see the gravity of the matter and of my position, and will wish to give an explanation."

"Before anyone answers such a charge we should know the person who makes it," said Mr. Gifford.

"I know no more than I tell you," replied the inspector. "And I am most painfully placed. I do not see how I can act otherwise than as I am doing."

"Supposing it should turn out that there has been some mistake of the kind, what would you have to do, Mr. Borderham?" asked Sir Jaffray.

"In the absence of Lady Walcote, I should have but one painful duty," he replied.

"And that?"

"To take means to find her and to ask an explanation of this most compromising series of coincidences."

A long and painfully embarrassing silence followed, in which all four sat thinking closely.

At the end, Sir Jaffray rose and pushed back his chair, and in a voice broken with emotion, he said:

"You had better do so, Inspector, let the consequences be what they may. The truth must come out. God help her."

Then another silence as painful as the former followed.

In the midst of it a commotion was heard in the large hall outside, and the door of the room was hurriedly opened.

"Her ladyship, Sir Jaffray," said the servant, and Lola, looking very pale and worn, but very determined, came in.

Sir Jaffray sprang toward her with a cry of pleasure and gladness.

"Wait," she said, stopping and drawing back from his outstretched arms, "first let the whole truth be told. I have come back now to tell it."

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOLA'S STORY.

At the moment of her first entering the room, Lola had not seen the police inspector or Mr. Gifford, but when she noticed them and saw that the former wore police uniform, she was startled.

"Who are these gentlemen?" she asked of Sir Jaffray.

But he was too much moved by her coming to be able to answer.

"Inspector Borderham is charged with the inquiry into the death of Pierre Turrian, and I am here looking into things for the family. I am Mr. Gifford, a private inquiry agent, of Southampton Row, London, and well known." He could not resist the little self-advertisement even at such a moment.

"I cannot speak before these gentlemen, Jaffray," said Lola. "What I have to say can be said to you—and to Beryl, for she already knows everything, or nearly everything."

At this the police-inspector pricked up his ears and looked across sharply at Beryl, who noticed the action and the look.

"Then we'd better go, Inspector," said Mr. Gifford, seeing the difficulty and trying to get over it with a rush.

But Inspector Borderham did not move.

"I really think it would be better for me to stay, Sir Jaffray," he said, a little nervously; afraid to offend the baronet and yet very unwilling to go.

"I see no necessity whatever for your presence," returned the baronet, shortly. "You must see that this matter has now taken a quite unexpected turn and that you can do nothing. You can stay."

"You will accept the responsibility?"

"What responsibility is that?" exclaimed Lola, excitedly. "Do you mean for my presence, sir? I tell you I have come back for the express purpose of facing anything that anyone may dare to whisper against me; that I should not have come back had it not been for the fact of Pierre Turrian's death, and that I shall remain"—she was going to say "at the Manor House," but checked herself and substituted—"where you shall know perfectly well where to find me whenever you wish. But now I have something to say to my—to Sir Jaffray which concerns no one but himself, and for the moment we must be left together."

A flash of rapid thought convinced the inspector that he could not possibly do any harm by doing what was asked, as he could easily shadow her ladyship should she attempt to get away again.

"I will do what you wish," he said, and with a bow he left the room with Mr. Gifford.

As soon as the three were alone there was a long silence. The warmth with which Lola had spoken to the inspector died out, the pallor which all had noticed on her first entry increased, and she leaned back on the sofa on which she sat as though weak and striving to collect her strength for a great effort.

Sir Jaffray sat apart, torn by infinitely painful emotions. Her first repulse of him had roused a multitude of disturbing thoughts in which his fears on account of her madness, his doubts about the part she had played in the death of Pierre Turrian, and his love quickened into hot passion by the sight of her,

were all mingled with a new and worse fear that her action was the result of a resolve not to let him go near her until she had confessed—what he knew not. He longed to rush and take her in his arms, and yet was held back in a conflict of doubts and fears.

Beryl sat quietly waiting for Lola to tell in her own way the story of which she knew the main features.

Lola broke the silence at length with a long, deep sigh. Then she said:

"Ah, Jaffray, I have been mad."

The words so fitted themselves into his worst fears on her account that he looked across at her with an expression which she seemed to read intuitively.

"Do you think I am guilty of the death of Pierre Turrian, Jaffray?" she cried, in a voice of pain and resentment. "And you, Beryl, do you?" And without waiting for any answer in words, reading one in the momentary, embarrassed silence of the two, she cried in a voice all sorrow and suffering, "Heaven help me, it is indeed time I came back. Oh, Jaffray, Jaffray!" and bursting into sobs, she buried her face in her hands on the head of the sofa.

Sir Jaffray could not bear the sight of her distress, but went quickly to her, and laying a hand on her shoulder, said:

"Give me your word that you know nothing of this, Lola, and I will believe you against the world."

She shook his hand off, as though his touch burnt her, and rising to her feet looked him steadily in the face.

"Were the positions changed, I should need no word of yours to make me feel your innocence, Jaffray," she said, in a tone which stabbed him. "But you shall have my word. As God is my judge, I know no more than yourself how this man met his death."

A flood of relief burst over him at the words, and again he made as though he would clasp her in his arms, and again she prevented him.

Then Beryl, who had waited with suspense for the avowal of her innocence, and who was quite ready to accept it and to be convinced by it, feeling something of the agony which Lola must at that moment be enduring, went to her, and making her sit down again on the sofa, insisted on sitting by her. She put her arms round her, and held her in a close embrace, and kissed her.

"Forgive me, Lola, for I too have wronged you in thought. I know what you must have suffered. Why did you not come to me?"

At first Lola tried to prevent the girl, but the touch of sympathy was too sweet to be long repulsed, and she first suffered, then welcomed, and at last reveled in the consolation thus offered.

"You make my heavy task lighter," she said to Beryl, presently, and then, after another pause, she began her confession, beginning, womanlike, with an implied attack upon Sir Jaffray himself.

"No, Jaffray, the blood of that man does not lie on my hands," she said, in a low, clear voice. "It was not for that reason that I would not let you take me in your arms just now. Heaven knows, I am bad and mad enough, but I am not like that."

The baronet made a gesture of protest, but she checked him; and sitting up on the sofa, with her hand in one of Beryl's, she went on, speaking in low tones, and with frequent pauses:

"I will not try to make my faults less than they are. Do you remember a story which that man told a few nights ago at the dinner table here? Well, the husband and wife in that story were Pierre Turrian and

myself! You have asked me often whether there was anything in the past that I had not told you. There was that. I was Pierre Turrian's wife. Now you can guess what I have suffered, and you know the reason why I fled."

"Pierre Turrian's wife!" exclaimed Sir Jaffray, repeating the words over and over again, as though he could not understand them. "Pierre Turrian's wife! His wife." Then, after a long pause, he asked, "Did you know this when——" He did not finish, but she understood.

"You heard the story as he told it," she answered.

"He said you tried to kill him then."

"That is true—as true as light," cried Lola, vehemently, and Beryl felt her start and her muscles harden with temper. "It was an impulse, coming either from heaven to free myself from a devil, or from hell to bind myself closer than ever to him. I know not which. But I acted on it, and never from that moment till now, when I see you shrink and quiver at the thought of it, have I regretted it. I will not palliate my act, or belittle it; but this I may say, I do not know that he could possibly have saved himself had I not stamped on his fingers. But I did not think of that then. He had made my life a hell, and when the chance seemed to come in my way, I tried to free myself, and I would do the same again."

She stopped and looked eagerly across at Sir Jaffray, hoping to read on his face an expression less hard than that which by her words she seemed to expect and not to fear.

But he made no sign of any kind, and she went on:

"The rest you know now, or can guess, nearly, except one thing. I will tell the truth now; the whole of it and you shall know the worst of me that can be

known. I thought he was dead, and when my father died, I dropped the name of Turrian, like a hated thing, and came here to England merely as Miss Crawshay." Then her voice grew harder and the note of defiance again was perceptible. "I meant to marry, and to marry well; and I had no wish to be known as the widow of such a cheat and villain as Pierre Turrian. Then I met you and resolved that you should marry me and—I married you without loving you."

The last words came slowly, and when she had finished she hid her face again as though now afraid to meet his look.

"That is the hardest thing you have said, Lola," said Sir Jaffray. Then for the third time a long silence came upon them all.

"I have been woefully punished," said Lola, in a low, half moaning voice of infinite sadness. "Out of both my faults have come the means to punish them. The man who was dead lived to stamp out the light of my life; the love I had never felt woke to make my punishment greater than I could bear. If I had never loved you, Jaffray, I could have faced without flinching all that that man could do or threaten. But when he had the power to put out the lighted love which I had thought would never be kindled, I was desolate. He came and forced himself upon me—and I dared not defy him utterly. I dared not tell you, because it meant—I must lose you, Jaffray. In a moment of madness, and thinking I could play a desperate game with safety, I tried to hold him at bay and yet to keep your love for myself. But it was useless. Some one else had learned the truth. Beryl here—and it came near costing her her life, for that evil, reckless man sought to take it even in this house. But like a woman

feeling for a woman's grief, Beryl tried to make the trouble as light for me as it could be. Heaven knows how I have thanked you for that and for all, Beryl," cried Lola, breaking off a moment to kiss the girl at her side.

"But there was no hope of escape," she resumed. "Failing in his attempt to kill Beryl, the madman came to me with a plan to kill you, Jaffray, and—but you remember the scene that morning which you interrupted. I knew then that every door of hope was shut against me, and when he had gone I went up to my room and tried to think out the best course. Do you know what determined me? Can you guess?"

She paused just an instant, and looked at him, as if hoping that he could read her thoughts, but before he had time to answer she continued:

"No, you will not guess—after what I have said and what has happened. I wanted to find some way out of the trouble which would have left some of your love for me remaining. I thought to kill myself; but I knew that then the man who is dead would have told you all my guilt and have tried to trade on the knowledge till the thought of me would have been hateful to you. I tried to tell you that afternoon, but the words were chilled on my tongue, and I could not. Then I saw no hope but to go away and so prove to the man who was thus between us that he could no longer profit by his secret. And I planned it easily. He wrote to me that afternoon telling me to meet him at night at nine o'clock near that cottage where he seems to have met his death. Then Beryl's letter came, and you knew that it was to ask me to go to her, and it formed just the excuse I wanted. I left word that I was going to Leycester Court, and I drove over there, stopping just short of the house and tell-

ing Robbins that I was uncertain what time I should return, and that one of the court carriages would take me back, and as soon as he was gone I walked back. You know the lonely path across the fields. I came that way and did not meet anyone the whole time."

"Did you go to—that cottage that night?" asked Jaffray when she paused, but Beryl sent a warning glance that he should let her tell the whole story in her own way.

"Yes, I met him there. It was before nine o'clock, and we walked back along the path I had come, stopping every now and then. I lied to him in one thing, knowing him. I told him that you knew everything, Jaffray; that I was a fugitive of my own free will; that never again should he or you set eyes on me, and that though he had beaten me, the victory should be as grit and ashes between his teeth. I taunted him with the blows that you had showered on him in the morning, and maddened him with jeers at the failure of his plans. What I did not let him even guess, however, was that my heart was sick and my spirit bruised to death. We parted, a blasphemous oath on his side and a curse on him from me, and I set my face to the darkness and plodded on through the night, alone with my grief and my knowledge that the sun could never rise again in all my life. One single solitary ray of comfort in it all I had—that perhaps you would never learn how false I had been, and so come to curse me for it."

Her hearers had listened breathlessly to this part of the story, marking every syllable, and when she stopped they could not understand her. Sir Jaffray himself had seen her hours later than she said, close to the cottage.

"Where did you go, Lola? and where and what time

did you leave that man?" he asked, hurriedly and in some excitement.

"I was with him probably an hour, not more; and I left him to walk straight to Branxton, in order to catch the mail that stops there at two in the morning. I did that. We parted about two miles from the cottage, I should think, on the field path that runs from there to the main road to Branxton, and close to the road."

"I am bewildered," he said again. "If I am under the impression that I saw you close to the cottage in Ash Tree Wood at a time past midnight that night, is it not possible for me to be right?"

"What do you mean? That I was by that ruined cottage after the time I tell you?"

"Let me make this clear," he exclaimed. "When I found you had gone I rode first to Leycester Court. That was directly after dinner. I came back hoping you might have returned, and then they gave me your letter. When I had pulled myself together I started off as hard as I could gallop to Mrs. Villyers' house, hoping against hope, that you might have gone there. Finding the place closed, and hearing, of course, that you had not been there, I rode again to the court, but did not rouse them, and then came on home. It was then a long way past midnight, and as I got to the corner of Ash Tree Wood, by the path which leads from the cottage, some one came to the gap in the hedge whom I took to be you. I called to you by name, but there was no answer, and when I had quieted my horse, which had taken fright at your appearance, I tried in vain to follow. Is it impossible that you can have been there at that time?"

"Impossible? Absolutely. You know the distance from there to Branxton. I walked every step of the

road. I reached the station at a few minutes before two, and at ten minutes past I left there in the mail train for Derby, where I had planned to change carriages and get a fresh ticket on to London."

Sir Jaffray rose quickly from his chair and rang the bell loudly, and, going to the door, told the servant to send Inspector Borderham and Mr. Gifford into the room at once.

"There is something that you must hear immediately, Inspector," he said, very excitedly. "There is a mystery here which must be probed at once. I can give you a clew to the whole affair," and then he began to tell hurriedly that part of Lola's story which had excited him, while the inspector, calm and stolid and skeptical, took copious notes of what he heard.

CHAPTER XXV.

WAITING FOR THE ARREST.

Sir Jaffray was so excited at the possibility of clearing Lola from the terrible charge of which she had been suspected, and so relieved at having his own distressing doubts removed, and, indeed, so overjoyed to see her again, that he lost sight of all the first part of her confession in thinking of the end, and he told the facts to the inspector with all the enthusiasm and confidence of profound belief.

But the two men to whom he spoke listened to it with thoughts very different from his.

"I have no doubt all that you say is quite correct," said the inspector, at the close, in the tone of a man who didn't believe a word of it; "but there are some few questions I should like to ask Lady Walcote, with your permission."

"Of course. Ask what you like," said the baronet.

"First, I am bound to caution you, Lady Walcote, that you are not compelled to answer any question, and that if you do answer, anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

"Ask what you please, sir," replied Lola, readily.

"What were the relations between you and this Pierre Turrian?"

"He was my husband."

"Ah! Will you tell me why you left home?"

Lola glanced at Sir Jaffray.

"There is no use in further concealment," he said, in answer to her look.

"It is a rather long story, but I will tell it you," and Lola told him.

"It is a very extraordinary tale," said the inspector, skeptically. "You admit then that you met the deceased that night, at nine o'clock, at the place where he was found dead. That is a very strong admission."

"Yet it is the truth."

"Why did you go armed? Why did you take that dagger with you?"

"I did not go armed. I know nothing of the dagger, beyond what I have read, that he was stabbed with a dagger, which may have been taken from here."

"What of the bracelet?"

"I know nothing of that either. Purposely, I left behind me every bit of jewelry which had not been mine before my marriage."

"Your theory is, then, that some one must have taken the dagger and the bracelet, and have gone with them to do this murder, in order to put the blame on you?"

"I have no theory," answered Lola, resolutely. "I tell you the truth. I had the letter from Pierre Turrian in the afternoon; I met him at the time named and at the place named. I walked with him for about an hour in the direction of the Brantxon Road, and left him at about ten o'clock close to that road. I then walked on as fast as my strength would allow to Brantxon, which I reached just before two o'clock. That is all."

"How are you going to prove that?" asked the inspector. "We have nothing so far but your bare word. What proofs have you?"

"I have come back to find them," replied Lola, stoutly. "If I had done this deed, I should not have come back, but, instead, I should have put an end to my life."

"Yet you went away?"

"For the same motive that brought me back—regard for Sir Jaffray. I went because flight seemed to me the only way out of a terrible entanglement; the only way to avoid even greater troubles. I came back because, for the sake of his honor, it was necessary that my name should be cleared of this suspicion."

"It is more to the point to ask Lady Walcote how she was dressed when she went away," put in Mr. Gifford, "and how it came that Sir Jaffray was able to identify her by her dress that night."

"I was dressed as I am now." She wore a plain black costume.

"I thought I saw you in a cloak with a hood to it, such as I remembered to have seen you wear on our American trip on board the boat."

"No, I was dressed as I am."

"The dress in my view is a secondary matter," said Mr. Borderham, dogmatically. "The important part of the affair is not what she wore, but what she did. Much of that is quite clear from her own admissions—most damaging admissions, too—and painful and unpleasant though it is to me"—and he turned deferentially to Sir Jaffray—"I am bound to say that Lady Walcote must consider herself under arrest."

"Certainly. I quite agree with you," said Mr. Gifford, in so decided a tone that the others looked at him. "The story that we have listened to is obviously a very difficult one to accept, and a very little sifting will show its absurdity. I would suggest, Sir Jaffray, that it be given out here that her ladyship is under surveillance; that her admissions amount to a virtual confession, and that her actual arrest will be made as soon as the formalities can be completed. With your permission, I will retire from the case, and I have

only to express my profound regret that I have been unable to help you."

As he said this he rose, and all the others stared at him in the greatest surprise, and, indeed, dismay.

Sir Jaffray was full of indignation.

"I must ask you for an explanation of this singular course, Mr. Gifford," he said, angrily.

"The explanation lies on the surface, Sir Jaffray," returned Mr. Gifford, bluntly. "You instructed me to find Lady Walcote. She is found without my assistance. You then commissioned me to look into this other matter, and again I have been able to do nothing, though everything is as clear as mud in a wine glass. There is no use, therefore, in my cooling my heels here at your cost any longer, when there's nothing to be done. I don't want to rob you. You must excuse my being blunt, but everybody is bound to take Inspector Borderham's view of what her ladyship has told us. The thing's as straight as this table edge."

"I don't take that view, for one," exclaimed the baronet, vehemently.

"Nor I, for another," exclaimed Beryl, as firmly; and Lola pressed her hand fervently for her support.

"Do you mean, Mr. Gifford, that you believe I killed that man, Pierre Turrian?" asked Lola, her voice vibrating, and her eyes shining with suppressed feeling.

"Your ladyship, it is not for me to turn accuser," he said. "I only think how a jury will view the case."

"Then I will stand my trial," cried Lola, indignantly, "and I will prove to the world at large that what you think is all wrong. If you think it, others will think it, and I will clear myself of all suspicion, or suffer any penalty the law may inflict. What have

I to do, Mr. Borderham? Shall I come with you now? I am ready."

She rose, looking firm and resolved.

"Madame, I am placed in a very difficult position. Sir Jaffray must feel well enough how difficult and how painful it is. Certainly, I do not wish to do a thing which can interfere with your chance of proving the truth of your story, and if I have your assurance and that of Sir Jaffray, if he will be responsible for your remaining here, I shall be quite willing to give you any reasonable time."

"I want no time," exclaimed Lola, passionately. "I am ready to go with you now."

"I think there should be some delay," said Sir Jaffray. I can then get some one to look into the matter who is not blinded by surface details——" and he glanced angrily at Mr. Gifford. "It must be possible to prove the truth of this."

"I think so, too," said the inspector. "How long——?"

But Lola burst in—

"I will not have an hour's unnecessary delay. The sooner I meet the charge the better, if you dare to bring it against me," she exclaimed, angrily.

"As you will, Lady Walcote. I regret that I have no alternative. There are certain formalities to be complied with; but if you will agree to surrender this evening, I will call here."

"Much the best way, Mr. Borderham," said Mr. Gifford, when the two had left the room. "Never heard a lamer tale, did you? This ought to be a good thing for you. You've gone straight as a good hound on a keen scent."

"I never had any doubt," replied the inspector. "The change of weapons was a little check; but there was never any doubt."

"I only wonder she came back; that's all. Better have poisoned herself. Wonder how the trains go? I shall just turn into the servants' quarters and find out. I shall give 'em a hint, too, of what's up. Well, I'm glad to have met you in this case. I like to see sharp work, even when I'm done myself. What time shall you take her? I'm sorry for the baronet; he's a good sort, and I'm afraid he won't thank you."

"I shall get the warrant this afternoon and take her some time late in the evening. I want as little fuss as can be. But it'll make a bit of a splash, won't it?" He spoke with an air of subdued but conscious pride, like a man who feels that he might boast if he pleased, but wishes to appear properly modest.

They parted then, and the private detective went into the servants' rooms to ask some questions about the trains and to tell them the news that Lady Walcote was to be arrested that night on a charge of having murdered the Frenchman.

Meanwhile, in the library, blank dismay had fallen on Sir Jaffray and Beryl; and Lola, as soon as her excitement of her interview with the police inspector was over, had broken down at the thought of the disgrace she was bringing upon the man she loved.

"If I were only dead," she moaned, "all this trouble would be ended. But I will not die till I have proved my innocence, and then the sooner death the better."

"Why don't you take time so that we may try to get some evidence of the truth?" asked Sir Jaffray.

"How could I wait?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Where should I wait? I could not stop here, and if I could not be here I would as soon be in jail," she cried, impetuously.

Sir Jaffray had no answer, for her reply untapped

the other stream of his trouble concerning her, and he could say nothing.

"You could have come with me, Lola," said Beryl, quietly. "I think, with Jaffray, that you should have waited, unless, that is——" She stopped and left the sentence unfinished.

"Unless what?" asked the baronet, glancing at her.

"What made Mr. Gifford turn suddenly in that strange way?" she asked, as an apparently irrelevant reply.

The baronet muttered angrily at the mention of the name.

"I was wondering whether he had some motive after all," she added. "But there, one clings to any straw."

"It is terrible, terrible," exclaimed Sir Jaffray. "I cannot stand this inactivity. I must do something, or I shall go out of my mind."

Then a long and most painful interval of silence came.

"Jaffray," said Lola, rising abruptly from the sofa, "we had better part now. It will be less suffering for you when we are not together. Good-by." She held out her hand to him. "I have made an ill return for all your love. But try, whatever happens, not to bear too hard a memory. I meant in all sincerity to pick out the course that would lead to the least trouble for you, and heaven knows I would have spared you all this if I could. Good-by."

"It is not that which troubles me now, Lola," he answered. "I am not such a brute as to be thinking of myself at such a moment as this. What I want to do is to see a way for you. Are you really resolved to give yourself up this evening? If you would delay it the truth might come out."

"I would rather face it at once. If I wait my resolve

may fail me altogether. I am a coward when I think of you, and death would be so much easier."

"Don't, Lola, don't," he cried in a voice of pain.

And then another long silence fell on the three.

Sir Jaffray broke it.

"I shall wire for some one to come and take up the threads which Gifford has bungled so terribly," he said, with sudden emphasis. "At all events it will be doing something and heaven knows we need a cool head here now. In the meantime there is no good-bye between us yet, Lola. I may be away some time, but I shall get back before—before the evening," he said, changing the phrase with some slight show of embarrassment.

He went away then, and Lola and Beryl both found in his departure some relief from the strain.

They sat together, their talking broken by long gaps of silence, and Beryl did her utmost to comfort her companion and to draw her confidence. One confidence Lola shared with her, and the little story was both told and listened to amid scalding tears from both. The sharing of the secret drew the two women closer than ever together.

As the time passed, Lola endeavored to assume a firm and resolute manner, but Beryl could see how completely she was overcome.

With difficulty Beryl induced her to take some food and wine.

"You will need courage, Lola," she said, "for Jaffray's and that other's sake." And at this plea she yielded, forcing herself to eat and drink.

In the evening, Beryl's agitation increased, and her usual calmness quite deserted her. But Lola, on the other hand, grew strong and determined as the time

of the arrest approached. It was characteristic of her to meet the trouble, when it came close, defiantly.

When Sir Jaffray came in, he was surprised to find Lola so cool and confident, and Beryl so agitated.

He told them what he had done; how he had seen Gifford, and spoken out his opinion in strong terms, and in the presence of one or two of the servants had told him to leave the manor. Then, how he had telegraphed to London, to a well-known firm of solicitors, accustomed to the unraveling of such mysteries, and had asked them to come down at once, and bring all the skilled help that was needed, and so on through all his plans.

The telling of this was a relief to them all. It enabled them to avoid those sides of the subject which were so oppressively sorrowful, and, moreover, it fed the flame of hope.

"One thing is certain, however," he said, in conclusion. "There must be a delay; at all events until the London lawyers have been down and looked into things. It must be so, Lola, and I must find a means of getting Borderham to wait for a few days, at any rate."

Just then the police inspector was announced, and came in, looking very grave but very important.

Beryl, who was sitting by Lola, felt her tremble, and her muscles stiffen for an instant, while she bit her lip hard.

"I think, Mr. Borderham, that this matter had better stand over for a day or two, after all," said the baronet, and he then described what he had done, and said that he would, of course, be responsible for Lola's surrendering, whenever the inspector desired.

The latter listened deferentially, but at the close he shook his head slowly.

"I am afraid that it is now too late," he said, gravely. "It is very painful to me, but after what passed this morning I have made all arrangements, and—"

"I am ready, sir," cried Lola, rising and facing him resolutely. "I will go with you at once."

At that moment Mr. Gifford entered the room, carrying a parcel in his hand.

"Wait a moment," he said. "I have something to say."

Sir Jaffray turned angrily to him.

"I thought I ordered you to leave the manor," he cried.

"But I didn't go, Sir Jaffray," replied Mr. Gifford, calmly. "And what is more, I stayed to some purpose, as I think you'll admit when you hear what I have to say."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STORY OF THE CRIME.

Inspector Borderham took the interruption by Mr. Gifford in bad part. He had persuaded himself so thoroughly that he was going to make his reputation over the case, and was so convinced that he had excluded the possibility of mistake, that he was impatient of anything that threatened delay.

"I don't see the necessity of this interruption," he said, in his stiffest official manner.

Mr. Gifford read him at a glance, and instantly resolved to puzzle him still more.

"I know it's unprofessional," he said, very suavely, "but there is a little matter of theft which I think ought to be cleared up before anything else is done, and Lady Walcote's presence is essential for that purpose."

"This is unwarrantable trifling, Mr. Gifford," exclaimed Sir Jaffray, indignantly, and the inspector seconded this opinion with a look. "We are here in the midst of the gravest crisis of our lives, and you, having backed out of the serious business this morning, now come with some sort of flippant triviality on your lips. I must ask you to withdraw."

"It is no triviality, Sir Jaffray," returned Mr. Gifford, apologetically. "I am not given to play the clown in the middle of a tragedy. What I say is correct, however; I have a charge of theft to make against a servant in the house, and I repeat that it must be heard here before anything more is done."

He went to the door, and, opening it, beckoned to someone outside to come in. A woman who had been in charge of two footmen entered.

She was Lady Walcote's French maid, Christelle Duval. She held her head up with a saucy, flaunting air of bravado, and looked angrily at Mr. Gifford.

"I charge this woman, Christelle Duval, with the theft of this dress," said Mr. Gifford, rapidly unfastening the parcel which he had been carrying and holding up a black dress trimmed with silk and lace. It is one of your dresses, Lady Walcote," he said, "and has been found among this woman's clothes."

"You are a fool!" cried the woman, angrily, and with vigorous gesture, speaking with a French accent. "A stupid fool! Have I not tell you twenty times, it is a dress madame gave me? You know it, madame, you know what I say. You give it me since a month in London; is it not so? It is only an old thing you have done with. You say, Christelle, you can have this.' But this man, this fool, fix on it and say I steal it. He is— Bah!"

She finished with a wave of the hand of infinite contempt, as if the detective were too much of a fool even for words.

"Now you are lying, you Frenchwoman," he said, coarsely. "You have taken that dress out of Lady Walcote's wardrobe within the last two days, and since Lady Walcote left the manor. You have stolen it, do you hear?"

"Ah," she exclaimed, with a toss of the head and a sneer. "I have it a month, and it never leave my possession one minute. Miladi knows. What do you say? Tell this—this *cochon* that he is a fool, and then let me go."

The witnesses of this scene had listened in blank

bewilderment while this had passed, and now Sir Jaffray interposed, angrily.

"This is insufferable," he cried.

"I think I can settle this in a moment," said Lola, who kept cool. "What Christelle says is quite true, Mr. Gifford. I gave her the dress at least a month ago. It is hers; and certainly she cannot be said to have stolen it."

"There!" said the girl, tossing her head again and curling her lip. "What did I say?"

"Is that so? Then I have made a mistake," said Mr. Gifford, with a very crestfallen air. "Do you mean that you gave her this for her own, to wear when she pleased?"

"Of course, what else, stupid?" exclaimed the woman, laughing saucily. "I tell you the dress has never been out of my possession, and I have worn it when I pleased." She repeated his words in a mocking tone, and laughed.

"I think this has gone far enough, Mr. Gifford," said the police inspector. "It is clear you have made a mistake. You had better leave the room," he added to the girl.

"One moment, please," said Mr. Gifford, calmly. "I am not quite the fool you seem to think. Now, I have something serious to say. You have all heard this woman," pointing at her with his forefinger, "own that that dress is hers, that she has had it a month and more, that it has never left her possession, and that she has worn it. You marked that, all of you?" he paused and looked round him.

"Well," asked Inspector Borderham, in a tone and with an expression that seemed to say the whole business was a tedious interruption.

"Well, I withdraw the charge against her of having

stolen the dress, and instead—" he stopped, and glanced round as if to enjoy the full effect of his next words—"I charge her with the murder of Pierre Turrian."

If he had aimed at producing a dramatic effect he could not have been more successful.

The words fell like a bomb in the midst of them all.

Lola turned as pale as death, and leaned for a moment against Beryl, by whom she was again sitting, and into Beryl's eyes there came a look of infinite pleasure making her face glow with warmth. Sir Jaffray waited in breathless suspense and fixed his eyes on the woman against whom the charge was hurled.

She turned on the detective like a wild animal at bay, bending her head aside as if half crouching between fear and desperation, her large dark eyes looking larger by contrast with the blanched face in which not a vestige of color was left.

"This is a serious matter, Mr. Gifford," said Inspector Borderham. "What grounds have you?"

"Ask her to tell you where is the bit of lace that is torn from that place. You'll see the pattern of the lace is a very marked one, and the tear very singular in form.

"Well, what do you say?" asked Mr. Borderham, turning to the woman. "You need not answer unless you like, and if you do answer, what you say may be used against you. Mind that."

There was a pause, during which the woman breathed twice through her wide-spread nostrils. Then, with an assumption of indifference, but in a voice that showed her nervousness, she said, with a shrug of the shoulders:

"How can I tell how I tear every little bit of lace that I wear?"

"Well, when did you wear that dress last?" asked Mr. Gifford.

"How can I remember? Do you think I have but one?"

"What dress did you wear the night Pierre Turrian was killed?"

"I don't remember. How can I?"

"You lie," cried Mr. Gifford, sternly. "You wore that dress, and you went to meet Pierre Turrian in it. You had it on when you stabbed him to the heart, and it was when you delivered that blow that he clutched at your dress, and tore from it the piece of lace that fits exactly into that tear. I have it here; and I myself took it from the dead man's fingers."

The woman reeled back before this indictment, and groping with her hands behind her for the wall, leaned against it for support, all the bravado and daring gone out of her manner.

"It is all a lie, a lie," she gasped, through her livid lips, which would hardly frame words.

"See, Inspector," said Mr. Gifford, showing him how exactly the piece of lace fitted in to the torn lace of the dress.

"I don't seem to understand," said Sir Jaffray, like one in complete bewilderment. "When did you find all this out? Why, this morning I thought you had thrown up the case."

"The scent was getting keener than ever then, and I wanted a little help. That was all," answered Mr. Gifford, with a smile. "I had suspicions yesterday, or the day before. The thing looked all so bright and clear against her ladyship there that I began to suspect it, and I wanted to know badly who it was that was sending those anonymous letters. Ah, you may well

start, Frenchwoman"—he turned to her—"you set up the suspicion yourself when you did that."

The woman tried to shrug her shoulders in reply, but she failed.

"I saw, as anyone might have seen," and he glanced hurriedly at the inspector, "that whoever sent those letters had a strong interest in getting Lady Walcote into this trouble, and the fact that the writer knew so much about where the dagger and the bracelet were, or rather where they were not, on the night of the murder, made me quite ready to think that she knew a little more. Again, another fact struck me as peculiar. Why should Lady Walcote carry away one bracelet only out of all her jewelry? If she had wanted it for its value, she'd have taken the lot, and the odds were dead against her wearing any such conspicuous piece of jewelry as an ornament when she was flying from home, and didn't want to be traced. That set up the notion that these things had been dropped just for effect, and that whoever had dropped them had done it with the object of planting this business on Lady Walcote.

"There was another little thing. That bracelet was broken in two, suggesting that if the thing was genuine, there had been a regular rough and tumble struggle between the murdered man and the woman who had done the deed. But there was no evidence whatever on the spot of any struggle—barring the bit of torn lace—while the two parts of the bracelet were found at such a distance from each other that only a most unusual sort of a struggle could have caused that. This helped me to think, therefore, that whoever had put that bracelet there had first broken it in two.

"But it was one thing to see that the trail was too broad, and another to find the right track. I made

up my mind that if Lady Walcote had gone out intending to kill that Frenchman, she wouldn't have been so determined to prove that she had been there as to use a dagger which everyone knew by sight, and to leave on the ground a bracelet which all the country side could identify, a piece of lace with enough character in it to hang half a shopful of women, and, as if that wasn't enough, a handkerchief with her name carefully written in flaunting letters in the corner."

"A handkerchief?" interrupted the inspector.

"Yes, a handkerchief. You hadn't heard of that. But we knew of it. Sir Jaffray found it. Well, I saw that the whole thing had been planned—and overdone. The proofs were too many, young woman, and too plain. Well, then, the question was—who had done it? Obviously, it was a woman—fifty things proved that—and equally obvious it was someone who not only knew the ins and outs of the Manor House, but had the run of her ladyship's jewel drawer. Well, there weren't many in the place who answered to that description, and I soon saw that it must be this—French-woman. You helped me to that, Sir Jaffray."

"I? How?" exclaimed the baronet, who had listened like the rest with rapt attention.

"You told me that you had seen your wife that night near the cottage, but had not seen her face. This told me that I was to look for a woman something like her ladyship in height and figure. Look," he cried, pointing to the woman, who with her back pressed against the wall scowled at them all as they turned their heads in her direction.

"Still, I wanted the proof," he continued; "and to that Lady Walcote helped me by coming back. I reasoned that the woman who had done this would be getting eager to get away, and that the best thing I

could do would be to give her a plausible excuse. That I did this morning. After the conversation here, I went to the servants' rooms, and repeated what I had said here—that the whole thing was found out, that Lady Walcote had virtually confessed, and that she was to be arrested to-night, and that I had thrown up the case, seeing where the truth was. It worked. This woman saw at once that it gave her a plausible excuse to go. She was not going to remain in the service of a lady charged with murder, and accordingly she declared she should leave at once. I was sure of my ground then, and, managing to get her out of the way for an hour, I stepped up and searched all her things over. I found the dress I wanted; and you know the use I made of it. But I found something more. She probably knows what it is; for she knows the dead man's writing well enough. I found a letter twisted up and forgotten, and actually in the pocket of the dress, and the letter was from the murdered man, telling her to meet him at the identical spot where the murder was committed, two hours after the time named in the letter to Lady Walcote."

This last thrust roused the woman by the wall, who drew herself together and made as though she was going to speak. She clenched her hands and glared with impotent anger at the man who had thus unveiled the story of her crime. But instead of speaking she uttered a piercing scream and fell in a huddled mass on the floor.

They picked her up, carried her, still unconscious, from the room, Mr. Gifford and Inspector Borderham following her, the latter looking anything but pleased at the turn matters had taken.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER THE STORM.

"Thank God for his mercy in this," exclaimed Sir Jaffray, in a deep voice of intense emotion, as the door closed behind Inspector Borderham, and his unconscious prisoner. "Thank God for his mercy."

Beryl first threw her arms round Lola, in the excitement of the removal of the strain, and then sitting still gave full vent to her tears of pleasure.

Lola was the least moved of the three.

The baronet went to her and took both her hands in his, and tried to draw her to him to embrace her.

But she held aloof.

"I did right to come back, Jaffray," she said, calmly. "Right to break my vow—for I had vowed never willingly to look upon your face again. But I could not bear that the world should think of you as married to a murderess. So I broke the vow."

"I should have found you, Lola. I would have searched the world through and ended my life before I had given up the search," he said, vehemently.

"Well, we shall see," she replied, evasively. "That wretched woman. What a villain has that man been through all."

"I don't understand it all now," said Beryl. "But I do not want yet to understand more than that you are cleared. Curiosity will come when I am not too agitated to think."

"I think I can give another clew," said Lola, slowly. She had drawn away from Sir Jaffray, and was sitting

again by Beryl, hand in hand. "I remember when Pierre was talking to me in the library the morning you came and found him there, he rushed to the door once suddenly, protesting he had heard someone eaves-dropping. I have no doubt this woman had been listening, and had heard him say that he would claim me as his wife. He has probably deceived her, as he has everyone throughout his life, and she has tried to work a double revenge on him by taking his life, and on me by making it seem that I had done it. But for that Mr. Gifford she might probably have succeeded. The man's life is one long course of crime, infecting all who came in contact with him."

"Mr. Gifford has done splendidly," said Beryl, enthusiastically.

"He has saved us all," said Lola, and she shuddered at the thought of how narrowly she had missed the shame and trouble of a public trial. "I can hardly realize now that but for him I should have stood tomorrow in the dock."

"Don't, Lola," exclaimed Sir Jaffray. "Don't let us think of it."

"I have been through worse trouble than that," she said, quietly. "I felt absolutely confident that the truth would be known, and the knowledge that the result would be to lift that load of shame from you, strengthened me to face anything. I would to heaven that I could as easily lift the rest." She stopped and sighed, and then, after a pause, added: "But even that may come with time."

She kissed Beryl, rose from the sofa, and going to Sir Jaffray held out her hand.

He looked at her in astonishment.

"What do you mean?"

"I will not go away twice without saying good-by.

I am going now, good-by. I have done what I came back to do."

While they stood for a moment looking at one another in silence and battling with the feelings which affected both in common, someone knocked at the door, and when it was opened Mr. Gifford came in.

"May I come in, Sir Jaffray?" he asked, rather needlessly.

"Well, what is it, Mr. Gifford?" said the baronet, a little sharply, in consequence of the interruption coming at such a moment. But the detective's glance of reproachful surprise at such a reception recalled Sir Jaffray to himself, and he made haste to add, "Come in, of course you can. You have done us the greatest service that anyone could have rendered, and we all want to thank you. I didn't like, and didn't understand your methods, mind you," he said, holding out his hand, "but you've made me your friend for life."

"And me," said Lola, shaking hands with him as well, "and without any reservation as to your methods. I don't know how you did it, and don't care. The result is enough for me."

"As for the methods," answered Mr. Gifford, with a smile, "we can't always please everybody, and this case looked very puzzling. I saw nothing for it but to go my own road. I couldn't even let you know what I was doing, Sir Jaffray. That was a sharp young woman, and if we'd overdone the part, we should have spoiled everything and scared her. But I didn't come in to talk about myself. I came to say that she's given up the whole thing. She's better a bit, though the doctor who's been looking her over to fetch her out of that fainting fit, says her heart ain't worth a pinch of snuff, and she's told the whole story. It isn't a pretty one. That fellow was a rare scoundrel. He'd been

carrying on with this girl under the pretense that he meant to marry her, and had had all her savings out of her, and had ruined her in that sense as well as in a far worse way, and she overheard him talking to you, Lady Walcote"—he turned to Lola, and hesitated just a moment as to what to call her—"about killing Sir Jaffray and then claiming you as his wife. She only half understood what was said, but it drove her mad, and she set her wicked little wits to concoct the devilish scheme of revenge, which we know now."

"How did she arrange a meeting with the Frenchman?"

"He arranged it with her, unfortunately for him. He wrote her that letter which I found. I expect that as a matter of fact he didn't know what to make of her, and what she'd do. He wanted a few days in which to mature any plans he could make after he'd had to leave the house, and he wrote that letter to make the appointment before he had seen Lady Walcote, of course. His object was, no doubt, to keep the girl from blabbing anything, seeing that he had been kicked out of the place under such circumstances. When they met, the girl says he tried to persuade her to let him into the manor that night so that he could have his revenge on you, Sir Jaffray, and that when she refused the whole thing came out, and in the row which followed, she says she struck him the blow which killed him in self-defense. I don't believe that part of the story, myself; I believe she went out resolved to murder him, and that she lured him into a false sense of security with some lying show of affection, and then chose a moment to run the knife into his ribs. There's nothing to prove anything either way; but she killed him, that's certain."

"When will she be tried?" asked the baronet.

"I doubt if she'll ever reach the dock alive," was the reply. "The shock in this room nearly made her heart leap out of her body, and as she lies upstairs, it's pumping away its strength at a rate that is dreadful to see. I think she's dying, and I believe the doctor thinks so, too."

"If she is charged will there be any need for my evidence, Mr. Gifford?" asked Lola.

"Not to hang her, my lady. There's enough and to spare for that purpose."

"There is nothing for me to do to make my part clear?" she asked again.

"Nothing at all. Nothing at all. No one can hold the faintest suspicion of a doubt as to the truth. The girl's story is absolutely consistent, and everything bears it out."

"Then if I wished to leave the country for—say for a time—there would be no reason why I should not," she persisted.

"So far as that matter is concerned, none whatever. Absolutely none."

"That is good," exclaimed Lola. "Very good."

The baronet asked a few questions on points of detail, and then Mr. Gifford left the room.

As soon as he had gone, Lola made ready again as if to go; but before she said anything, Beryl got up and stood between the other two, and, touching both, she said:

"This must not be. I know what Lola thinks to do. To go away. You must not let her go, Jaffray. There is a reason which she will tell you—" her cheeks began to flush as she said this, while Lola's flamed like fire—"she has not yet finished telling all her secrets, and this is one which, instead of parting you, must hold you two together for always. There is no bar between

you now—and in its place is a tie. You must not part for want of a plainly-spoken word. I am going up to the mother, Jaffray, to tell her all of this strange story and when I come down again I shall bring a message of the mother's love to you, Lola, and a bidding for you, Jaffray."

Then she kissed Lola, and went quickly out of the room, leaving the two standing like detected lovers, half-abashed, and yet all longing to fall in each other's arms.

They stood thus silent, side by side, for full two minutes.

Then Sir Jaffray spoke.

"Beryl is right, Lola. There is no bar between us now."

"Beryl is wrong, Jaffray. There is the bar of my deceit. I shall be better away from here."

"What is the tie?" he asked, though guessing the answer to come.

She made no reply in words, but looking up, shot a swift look of half-pride, half-fear at him, and looking down crimsoned more deeply than before.

He read the look, and his heart leaped with exultation.

"Come," he said, opening his arms, and trying to draw her in.

"It cannot be," she said, shaking her head slowly and sadly, "on account of the past."

"It must be," he whispered, "for the hope of the future. Where should my child's mother rest save on my heart. Come, sweetheart; wife, come!"

And this time he took her by gentle force, and drew her to him, till her heart beat against his, her face lay kissing his, and her eyes shrank, and smiled, and

glowed by turns before the hot glances that shone from his.

They stayed thus a long time in silence.

Sir Jaffray had no thought now, save that of taking her back to him.

The determination had come with the rush of relief at finding that she was entirely cleared of suspicion of having had any part in the deed by which Pierre Turrian had lost his life. The fear lest, in a moment of madness, Lola had been wrought up to compass the death of the man who had held her in such cruel bondage had made her other conduct—the deceit as to the relationship between her and Turrian—seem light by contrast, and Sir Jaffray's relief when she was cleared of the crime was so great that it swept away with it all resentment at what she had done. The fact that he had himself deemed her guilty of Pierre Turrian's death set up, too, a feeling of remorse which made him anxious to make amends to her.

But, above all, his love for her, so deepened and intensified in the hours of his suspense and fear, made him only too ready to grasp at any reason to keep her by him.

There was no bar now between them. Beryl had been right in that, and he thanked the girl for her words. So far as the world knew, there never had been, and if only this one fact could be kept secret, all might be as it had been before. Then his resolution was as strong as iron.

He would never let Lola leave him. Even if the whole truth had to be told in the highway and from the house-top, that should never happen.

But Lola did not see the matter as he did, and she was infinitely perplexed what course to take.

The shelter of the strong arms that held her so

tightly was sweeter than life itself to her without him, yet, knowing the real deceit she had practiced from the first, and fearing that he must despise her, she seemed as if she dared not stay with him, dreading the growth of a cloud between them and a frosting of his love.

Her love for him, and all that was to come of it, had changed her strangely.

"I could die happily now, Jaffray," she said, in a whisper, breaking a long silence.

"There must be no talk in that strain between us any more, dearest," he said. "We are man and wife, now as before. Nothing shall ever make me let you from me. And never again must there be a cloud between us." He kissed her then.

"I was afraid to tell you," replied Lola, understanding him. "Afraid, not of your anger, but of losing your love. What I wrote in my letter was all the truth. I thought that I should make that man feel if I left you, that there was nothing more to be gained by him, and that in that way I could still keep hold on your heart, though only in memory. I know now where I made my great mistake. When he came back I ought to have told you the full truth. But I could not. I could not bear the thought of having to leave you, for I had grown to know that life without you was worse than death, and I tried to keep you at any cost. It was madness."

"If the truth had been told I should never have ceased to love you, sweetheart. I am not made in that way. I wish you had told me all."

Lola shivered as he said this—the only rebuke he uttered throughout all.

"Well, it will be a memory," she said, dreamily and sadly. "A man who plucks out his eyes lives on in

darkness remembering the light. I cannot stay with you, Jaffray," she added, after a pause. "There would always be the bar between us of the past, and in the years to come the knowledge of it would wreck our lives."

"And what of the child?" he added, with a blunt directness.

For answer she hung her head and burst into tears.

"I don't know what to do," she sobbed.

"I will tell you what we must do. First, we must love one another, and in that love the memory of all that has not been bright and well with us in the past must be blotted out. Then we must act for the welfare of the little one. In that we must go away and be married privately over again. Then we will start off again on another honeymoon, half round the world, and come back, as friend Beryl says, without a bar between us, and with that tie. No other course is even possible. Believe me you must yield yourself to me on this, and let me settle all."

He spoke in a tone of firm resolve.

"I cannot resist," replied Lola, at the end of a long pause. "And it shall be as you say. But I am full of heavy dread and foreboding. I——" The tears came in a sudden flood, and choked her utterance. "I have spoiled your life, Jaffray; and, save for the child's sake, I would that I were dead. I shall never be your wife. I feel it."

He pressed her close to him, and comforted and petted her, and soothed her, until she was again self-composed; and presently Beryl came down, bringing a loving message from Lady Walcote, asking that Lola would go to her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"BETTER SO."

The wretched woman, by whose desperate deed of revenge Pierre Turrian met his death, did not live to be put on her trial, and thus the secret of Lola's marriage with the dead man was kept.

The solicitor, to whom Sir Jaffray had telegraphed when he thought Mr. Gifford had thrown up the inquiry, arrived and had no difficulty in helping to make quite plain the story of Lola's innocence, while keeping secret all that was desired. A plausible reason was invented for Lola's absence and her return was accepted as proof of the reason, while the confession of the woman, Duval, made her innocence incontestable.

All this was easily arranged, and the newspapers, with fears of libel proceedings before them, suddenly found out how foolish was the idea that Lola could ever have been connected with the deed; and the case was cited everywhere as a proof of the weakness of circumstantial evidence in general, and this evidence in particular.

The sun was, indeed, shining brightly again upon a path cleared of all troubles and obstacles before Lola had recovered from the shock and strain through which she had passed. The reaction prostrated her, and though Sir Jaffray was anxious for the remarriage to take place, Lola was unable to leave the Manor House for some days, being really weak and ill.

As soon as there was a chance of her being able to travel, Sir Jaffray went in advance to London to make

all the necessary arrangements for the marriage to take place in absolute privacy at a church in the north-east of London, where the incumbent was an old college friend in whom he could confide.

Lola followed a couple of days later, and was very low spirited and broken in nerve when saying good-by to old Lady Walcote and Beryl.

"How changed she is," remarked Beryl to her old friend. "She used to have such dauntless courage and spirit."

"She will be better after the child is born," said Lady Walcote. "A couple of months' careful nursing will make all the difference. They talk of travel; but I told Jaffray he must take her straight to a healthy place and just wait for her to mend. The strain on her mind all this time must have been terrible to bear. Poor girl."

"Her presentiment is very strong that she will not marry Jaffray," said Beryl, and Lady Walcote smiled.

"She is sure to have queer fancies just now. Her nerves are regularly shaken. Time will cure all that, however."

"Hers has been a terrible life to live," said Beryl, pityingly.

"As the twig is bent, so the tree inclines," was the sententious reply. "She came of a bad stock. I wish Jaffray had never seen her." The old lady's tone was sorrowful, rather than hard, as she spoke. "But it might have been much worse, and all the world might have known," she added.

"She has suffered enough to make one forget."

"I shall never forget, Beryl. She is Jaffray's wife, and hold my tongue and open my heart as wide as I can to her for his sake—but I can never forget."

Beryl said no more. She could not change Lady

Walcote's feelings toward Lola, and she liked her old friend least when she uttered these hard things against Sir Jaffray's wife.

That evening Beryl was to return home, and after luncheon she made her preparations.

While she was with Lady Walcote, spending the last hour, a telegram came for her.

It was from Sir Jaffray.

"Slight accident on railway. Lola very ill in hospital here, St. Albans. Can you come at once?—Jaffray."

"There is something very serious the matter," said Beryl, reading the message to Lady Walcote. "If there has been another shock, I fear the worst."

"Will you go?" asked Lady Walcote.

"Yes, at once," she answered.

She wrote out a reply to the message, and got ready to start immediately, instead of going home.

By driving to Braxton she caught a fast express train, and, telling the railway authorities what was the object of her journey, the train was stopped for her at St. Albans, while a message was telegraphed to Sir Jaffray, giving the time of her arrival.

He was on the platform to meet her, and she saw by his face that the news was of the worst.

"Thank you for coming, Beryl. You are always reliable," he said.

"Lola is very ill, I can see," she answered.

"She is dying," he said. "There is little or no hope."

He led her quickly to a carriage which was waiting, and they were driven at a rapid pace to the hospital.

"What happened, and how?" asked Beryl.

"I scarcely know. I believe there was a slight collision just outside the station here, and the engine and a couple of the carriages of the train in which Lola

was coming to me——” He paused a moment, and closed his eyes as if in pain. Then he resumed: “The carriage she was in left the line. No one seemed to be hurt save her. You can guess the reason. They found her lying at the bottom of the carriage in a dead faint, but when they couldn’t restore her they brought her here. That has happened which means the loss of two lives. She is unconscious. I have seen her, but she knows nobody. She murmurs my name, but she is dying.”

He said no more, and Beryl, seeing how he suffered, forbore to ask him any questions.

When they reached the hospital, they went at once to the private ward in which Lola lay. There was no change in her condition. She was still unconscious.

Beryl questioned the nurse, who confirmed all that Sir Jaffray had said as to the danger.

“Is there no hope?”

“I do not say absolutely there is no hope,” answered the nurse, laying stress on the word. “There is almost always some hope. But the doctor does not think that she can possibly live half-a-dozen hours. It would be wrong to mislead you.”

“Will she recover consciousness?” was Beryl’s next question.

“It is impossible to say,” answered the nurse.

“And is there nothing we can do? Nothing that all the doctors in all this place can do?” asked Beryl, excitedly. “It is so dreadful to wait here with idle hands for death.”

“All that can be done has been done. A physician has been wired for from London, and is coming. But——” She shook her head despondingly, “I am afraid no earthly help will be of the least use. She is half dead now.”

Beryl, going to the bedside, stooped over Lola and kissed her, murmuring her name and trying vainly to rouse some chord of consciousness in her.

But she lay still and white as a marble figure, her eyes closed and her lips all blue and bloodless. The breathing was so faint and fluttering as to be scarcely perceptible, and she seemed, as the nurse said, like one half dead.

Then Beryl went back to Sir Jaffray, who had not gone into the bedroom, and brought him to the bedside.

"You would rather be here," she said, gently, "and if Lola wakes at all, she would rather her eyes fell on your face than on any sight on earth," and she made him sit where Lola, if she woke, would see him instantly, and she bade him wait without even a whispered word.

The nurse, seeing this, in her quiet way speculated as to the connection between them all.

The time dragged on wearily, and the hours of the evening deepened into night.

The nurse performed her duties with that deft, clever quietness which marks the work of those shrewd ministering angels of the sick-room, and watched with the keen eye of trained experience for any change in the patient.

The hospital doctor came in now and then, hearing that the sufferer was the wife of a baronet, and eager at once to snatch a life from the grave, and to serve the stern looking, handsome, distinguished man, who sat in patient silence through the hours with no look on his face save that of mental suffering, except when his eye wandered to the doctor's face, striving with hungry eagerness to read there some sign which should lead him to change his stony despair for hope.

Toward midnight, the great man came from London. He had been detained, or he would have been down some hours before.

Then both Beryl and Sir Jaffray were sent into the adjoining room, and left there to wait through all the terror and suspense of the medical examination, and to try not to fear that the verdict would confirm their darkest dread.

But it did.

A glance at the great man's face, passive and immobile as it was by nature and habit, told them both that there was no hope.

He tried at first to rob his verdict of as much of its terror as possible, but Sir Jaffray stopped him.

"Let me know the worst, please, at once."

"There is no hope."

Sir Jaffray closed his eyes, and bent his brows together, and drew in his breath sharply through his clenched teeth, while he clasped his hand on the chair back he was holding, as he fought down his emotion.

"How long will she live?" he asked, after a full minute's silence.

"She cannot survive the night."

Sir Jaffray's face was gray with suffering as he thanked the great man for his having told him the truth, and added:

"Can I go back to the bedside?"

He went back without another word, and sat down again closer to the bed this time, and holding one of Lola's hands, and chafing it, as it lay cold and white in his.

Now and then he bent his head and kissed it, and sometimes he would kiss her lips; but he did not speak a word to anyone.

Toward the dawn the nurse noticed a change, and, going out, called the doctor, who came hurriedly.

Sir Jaffray watched them both silently; marked every flitting expression of the doctor's face; he was a young man with large and serious eyes, but the husband read no hope in them, and he judged that the end was coming.

Then he thought he could detect the faintest movement in the flaccid fingers which he held in his, and the thought of it made his heart leap with great throbs of excitement.

But nothing followed, and the pale silent figure lay just as lifeless and still as before.

This happened three times, and the last time a faint flickering sigh fluttered from the lips. Then came a slight movement, and a moment afterward Lola opened her eyes.

Her face was turned straight toward Sir Jaffray, and seeing him, she gave a wan, feeble smile, while the fingers he held seemed to close on his hand, as if to press and hold it.

He stooped over her, and whispered her name.

"Lola."

She opened her eyes again and seemed to smile.

Then he pressed his lips to hers, that she might feel his warm kiss, while she was still conscious.

Again came a long interval of what appeared to be unconsciousness, and at the end of it she opened her eyes again, and her lips moved. He bent first his lips to her and kissed her, and thought he could feel an answering kiss; and then calling her name again, he put his ear close to her, to listen if she could reply.

He could hear nothing.

Then he got up from his chair and knelt down by the bedside, and holding her hand in his still, prayed

earnestly and fervently to God for her. She heard him, and at the end looked at him and smiled once more.

So they stayed for a long time until Lola made an even stronger sign of consciousness. Her fingers pressed his hand and seemed striving to draw it toward her.

He looked eagerly into her face, and her eyes were wide open and her lips moved.

He bent down to listen, but she still drew his hand as if to have him closer, and he stooped his face low until his lips touched hers, and then she kissed him.

He strained to hear if she could speak.

He waited a long time while she seemed to make a great effort, then he caught the faintest echo of her last words:

"Good-by. Better so, Jaffray."

As he listened the tears stood thick in his eyes, and blurred them till he could see nothing.

He heard her sigh twice, heavily; felt the fingers press his once again, and then unclasp and lay listless.

She was dead; but the sweet comfort of his presence at the last moment had left on her lovely face a smile of infinite peace.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AFTER THREE YEARS.

On a very bright, hot July afternoon, three years after the death of Sir Jaffray's wife, Beryl Leycester and Mrs. De Witt sat chatting in the shadow of a great cedar tree which spread its broad branches over the center of the lawn at Leycester Court.

Beryl looked older and even more thoughtful than formerly, but Mrs. De Witt had not changed in anything except the fashion of her dress, which had about it the lingering suggestion of widowhood.

She had been a widow for eighteen months, and she had gone over to the court from Mrs. Villyers' house for a purpose which was fully defined in her thoughts. Sir Jaffray was expected back that day, and the little woman, who had her plans well matured, remembered Beryl's former relations with him, and was resolved that the two should not meet if she could help it unless she was present.

She meant to be Sir Jaffray's second wife, and though she had been glad that he had not come home during the first few months of her widowhood she had chafed a good deal at his continued absence. She was getting impatient to be married again.

Beryl saw through the plans quite as clearly as Mrs. De Witt.

"I wonder that Magog has stopped away so long, don't you, Beryl?" asked Mrs. De Witt, after watching, irritably, Beryl's quick fingers over some fancy work.

"Why should I wonder? He had only himself to please, and he had a life's sorrow to live down."

"A life's fiddlestick! You don't mean to say you don't think Lola's death was the best possible thing under the circumstances?"

"Circumstances?" repeated Beryl, with a glance of interrogation.

"Yes. The circumstances that the world doesn't know. Magog told me everything. He always did."

This was not true, and Beryl suspected it. All that Mrs. De Witt had ever learned had been a somewhat garbled tale which had leaked out from the servants and reached Mrs. Villyers, and through her Mrs. De Witt. "You know as well as I know that Lola could never have made such a man as Sir Jaffray permanently happy. You don't want to cool yourself with a typhoon, and Lola did everything in extremes."

"She loved her husband so," said Beryl.

"Perhaps," answered Mrs. De Witt, with a contemptuous sniff. "But you don't want love to make a happy marriage. If you did I should have been the most miserable wretch on the face of the earth. No, no. My good husband had a good many peculiarities, but he didn't go to that ridiculous extreme; and no married life that I ever observed could have been more absolutely placid and agreeable than ours."

"Some people might not care for marriage of that sort," said Beryl. "It's an acquired taste."

"Besides, Lola was sure to have broken out some time," said Mrs. De Witt, laughing unpleasantly. "She came of that sort. I knew something of her father. He was the most unscrupulous man that ever walked the earth, with a fearful reputation, which he fully lived up to. But a perfect gentleman."

Beryl let her work fall on her lap and looked up at her companion.

"‘A perfect gentleman,’ ‘most unscrupulous,’ ‘fearful reputation.’ How do those go together?"

"Well, I suppose a man can be a gentleman and an unscrupulous scoundrel at the same time, can't he?" answered Mrs. De Witt. "Surely, even in your Arcadia here, you've met polished men of the kind."

"Oh, I see. Probably I have. But I don't call them gentlemen—or at all events I don't think of them as gentlemen. But then, I'm not of the world."

"Manifestly," commented Mrs. De Witt, dryly. "But that's not the point. I mean that probably she would have broken out somewhere if she hadn't died——"

"As she did die, shall we leave her alone?" said Beryl, interposing.

"Certainly, if you are so suddenly zealous of her good name. She did you an ill turn, however, when she married Magog."

Beryl smiled at the thought.

"Yes, in a sense," she answered. "It was a dream of the silly season of my girlhood, I think, that I should marry Jaffray; and if it was an ill turn she broke up the dream and sent me to practical work among the people here. I don't fancy they would consider it an ill-turn."

"Well, it's very sweet of you to concentrate your whole life to the service of the poor. Go teach the orphan boy to read, and teach the orphan girl to sew, and let the foolish yeoman go; and that sort of thing," quoted Mrs. De Witt without any special application. "If you like the life, that's all right. I couldn't bear it. The children all smell so. But if you've found your life work, that's excellent."

"I don't know that I've found my life work," said Beryl, smiling to herself over the embroidery. She read Mrs. De Witt's meaning easily enough. And she added, mischievously, "Have you come over to-day to get some hints about it?"

"No, thank you," said the little woman, with something like a shudder. "I came over because I want to see Magog as soon as possible on his arrival."

"What makes you come here then?" asked Beryl, still smiling. "Why don't you go to the manor and wait for him there?"

"I can trust you, Beryl," said Mrs. De Witt, as if with a burst of confidence. "He does not want to make it too conspicuous that he comes first to see me, and so we think it best to meet here for the first time. You understand."

"Not in the least," and Beryl laughed outright. "I am so stupid, you know. Do you mean that Jaffray has written to tell you that he is coming here this afternoon, and has asked you to meet him here, because you are engaged to be married, or going to be, and he does not like to go to your London house, or to Mrs. Villyers', or to have you at the manor? Is that what you mean?" She continued to laugh, and her hand, leaving her work on her lap, stole into a pocket, where her fingers touched lovingly and lingeringly a letter crumpled and worn and well thumbed from constant reading.

"We are not actually engaged. I don't mean quite that," said Mrs. De Witt, not at all relishing Beryl's plain questions.

"Then what do you mean?" asked the girl.

"I don't think that at present Magog would like me to tell even you, Beryl."

"No, I should think he wouldn't," replied Beryl,

still smiling as broadly as before. "I suppose I ought to congratulate you, oughtn't I? It's lucky I had that old dream of mine broken by Lola, isn't it? Else I might not have been able to laugh in this way and enjoy the situation quite so much. When did he write to you to make this strange appointment?"

"I can't tell you everything, Beryl."

"No, no. Of course. Besides, you don't know everything, do you, dear?" answered the girl, innocently. "I must take him to task for this, you know, when he comes. I don't think he has the least right to use the court for that sort of purpose. It's no Cupid's Court, you know. I think I shall go in and just tell papa," and she rose as if to do so.

"I don't think I should say anything until Magog comes," said Mrs. De Witt, feeling a little uncomfortable. "I'll tell him when he does come, and no doubt he'll make it all right."

"Oh, very well," replied Beryl, sitting down, as though satisfied with the suggestion.

Then she hummed a snatch of a little song, and after a moment took the much-fingered letter from her pocket.

"I can't think what he means to do," she said, her forehead crinkling into a frown, while the rest of her face, from her eyes downward, was laughing merrily. "When he wrote to me he can't have had the least idea of it—unless he means to marry us both"—she looked up as though impressed with a sudden idea—"that must be it. In this letter, written three months ago, you know, he just asks me whether if he comes home I'll marry him. And now he seems to have asked you. I tell you what we ought to do. We ought to put the two letters together and face him with them the moment he comes. Where is yours?" and she held

out her hand for it, and looked Mrs. De Witt straight in the eyes.

At that moment the sound of carriage wheels was heard in the drive approaching the house.

"That will be Jaffray," said Beryl. "You had better be quick."

At that moment Mrs. De Witt did what was very rare with her—she lost control of her temper completely, and showed it.

She got up, and two little hectic spots showed in the middle of her cheeks, which had paled in her excitement, and she stood for a moment looking very angrily at Beryl. Next she stamped her foot on the ground, and exclaimed, excitedly:

"I hate you; but I'll pay you out for this sly deceitful trick."

Then she walked away cross the lawn, and, without passing through the house, went round to the front where her carriage was waiting, and was driven rapidly away.

Beryl watched her go, pleased at the result of the encounter, and then with a great gladness in her heart went to meet her lover.

He was waiting for her in a room overlooking the lawn, and had seen her coming, and surprised her as she entered the French window.

He caught her in his arms and held her.

"Beryl."

"Jaffray."

That was all they said for some moments.

"I have looked forward to this moment for many months," he whispered, after the silence.

"And I all my life," was the thought in Beryl's heart, but she would not utter it in words yet.

"It makes the home-coming infinitely sweet, Beryl.

I should never have come back if you had not written as you did."

"It was not in my heart to make you a wanderer for all your life, Jaffray," she answered, with eyes that laughed with gladness. "Thus I was obliged to write so," and then they sat talking in such a strain as only sensible people can talk in, when they are deeply in love with one another, and have met after a long parting, each hungry for even the smallest sign and token of the other's love.

When they had grown a little less love hungry, and a little more sensible, Sir Jaffray told her fully how the knowledge of his love for her and his desire to have her for his wife had become the abiding thought and wish of his life. He opened out the whole secrets of his heart to her, speaking with absolute unreserve and freedom of Lola—the storm which had drawn the needle of his love from the point of its old time faith, and the passion which had consumed itself in the fierce hot madness of that time.

"In all the wild, tempestuous incoherence of the time three years ago, when I first went away, I had no stable thought or plan of any kind. I drifted on the beating surf. But gradually there seemed to shape out itself in the gloom of the blinding storm a little beacon light, at first faint, flickering, and intermittent; but after a time steady, brighter and promising, and I began to steer by it. Then in all things I began to hear in thought the sound of a voice I knew well—the voice of a steady counselor of old. Next, the light gave way to a much pleasanter companion—a face that looked at me with eyes in which the expression varied with every mood I felt. After that time the longing to come home began to form and to grow with

increasing strength and desire. I thought it was chiefly the wish to see the old home—but it wasn't."

He stopped to smile into her happy face.

"It was to see you, Beryl. Just that and nothing more. I had an illness some time after that and things went badly with me, and I longed for a sight of your face and a look such as I had often in old times from your eyes. The memory of you seemed to calm me in my delirium, and then in a moment between the fever I promised myself that if I got well I'd write and just tell you frankly how it all was with me. That made me well; but then I grew nervous about writing, and put it off and off, and the time slipped by while another fever took me—this time to come home and have you for my dear, dear wife at the manor. Then I wrote—but not to you. I thought I'd be clever," he said, with a smile, "and I wrote to the mother, and asked her for news of you. Then she told me what I had never dared to guess, Beryl, but what her clever eyes had seen. And I wrote to you. I can smile at it now," and he did smile to the girl by his side—"but no one can guess the suspense I went through while that letter was going and the answer coming to me."

Beryl laughed sweetly, and hid her face on his breast.

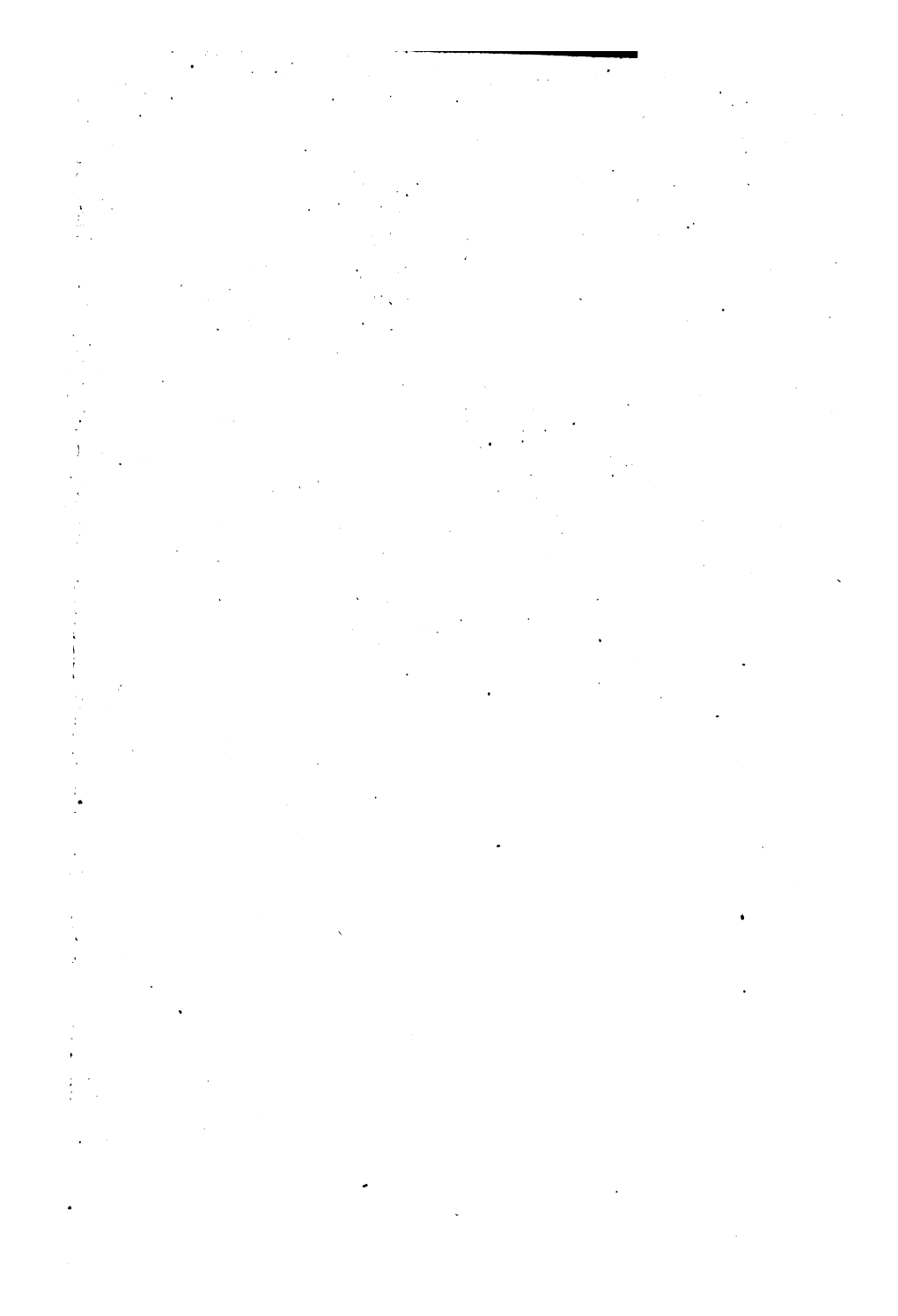
"I think I read the mother's letter at least six times a day—conning every phrase in it to try and see how far she had been able to get at your mind. Ah, Beryl, I longed for the comfort of your love. And when the letter came I was like a boy again, and fretted and fumed and worried because I couldn't get away at once. And all the journey home I have been thinking how we should meet, and longing for it, as I told you; just hungering to feel your soft arms about me and

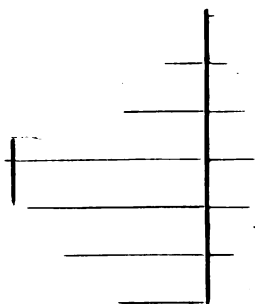
kisses on my lips. Did you long for it, sweet-
?"

stooped over her as he whispered the question.
en she told him.

rowing her arms round his neck she whispered:
have hungered for it all my life, Jaffray," and
lips met in a long sweet kiss of passionate
thal.

THE END.





1912

1910

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